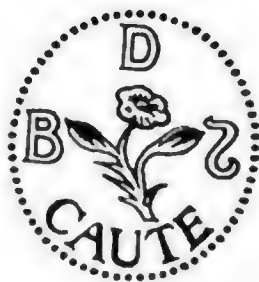


LETTERS TO NO ONE IN PARTICULAR

**A Discussion and Illustration of Spinoza's
'Fragment' or "On the Improvement of the
Understanding"**

'Caute' the Rose Signet



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'Fragment' or "On the Improvement of the
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Charles M. Saunders

Pulayana Publishing

2014

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DEDICATION

In Memory of
Ludovicus Meyer

Friend and publisher of
Baruch Spinoza

He ignored Spinoza's deathbed request that
he burn the "Ethics."

We are forever in his debt
for ignoring that request.

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SPINOZA

By Jorge Luis Borges

The Jew's hands, translucent in
the dusk,
polish the lenses time and again.

The dying afternoon is fear, is
cold, and all afternoons are the
same.

The hands and the hyacinth-blue
air

that whitens at the Ghetto edges
do not quite exist for this silent
man who conjures up a clear
labyrinth-

undisturbed by fame, that
reflection
of dreams in the dream of another
mirror, nor by maidens' timid
love.

Free of metaphor and myth, he
grinds

A stubborn crystal: the infinite
map of the One who is all His
stars.

FROM THE ETHICS LAST PAGE

Taken from the last page of “Ethica in Geometrica Ordine Demonstrata” by Baruch Spinoza

“I have thus completed all I wished to set forth touching the mind’s power over the emotions and the mind’s freedom. Whence it appears, how potent is the wise man, and how much he surpasses the ignorant man, who is driven only by his lusts. For the ignorant man is not only distracted in various ways by external causes without ever gaining the true acquiescence of his spirit, but moreover lives, as it were unwitting of himself, and of God, and of things, and as soon as he ceases to suffer, ceases also to be.

Whereas the wise man, in so far as he is regarded as such, is scarcely disturbed in spirit, but, being conscious of himself, and of God, and of things, by a certain eternal necessity, never ceases to be, but always possesses true acquiescence of spirit.

If the way I have pointed out seems exceedingly hard, it may nevertheless be discovered. Needs must it be hard, since it is so seldom found. How would it be possible, if salvation were ready to our hand, and could be without great labor found, that it should be by almost all men neglected?

But all things excellent are as difficult as they are rare.”

POEM AND LAST PAGE

Why the mention of lenses being polished?

Can your mind's eye picture a clear labyrinth, can you describe it?

What sense can we make of: "that reflection of dreams in the dream of another mirror?"

What might it mean to be free of metaphor and myth?

How would a stubborn crystal appear?

What might be the mind's power over the emotions?

What does Baruch mean by, "...true acquiescence of his spirit?"

What way has Spinoza shown to us and what about this result is so hard?

What has been neglected by almost all men?

What might Baruch mean in the last line when he states: "All things excellent are as difficult as they are rare?"

A Puzzler:

When asked if he believed in God, why did Albert Einstein reply that he believed in Spinoza's god?

CAPSULE

LETTERS TO NO ONE IN PARTICULAR

An illustration and discourse on Spinoza's “Fragment” or “On the Improvement of the Understanding”

Dear Friends,

We need to talk, and soon and seriously. There is an inordinate number of people out there who speak very poorly and constantly about us; humans that is. There seems to be a common agreement across nations and cultures and religions everywhere and there is a wide acceptance of the supposed fact that, “Human perception is flawed”. And the case against us is much more deleterious than might be imagined. This confusion holds human development hostage in innumerable spheres of influence.

In every discipline imaginable and in most publications and media we hear that human beings are interlopers on earth and somehow we have near willfully set the planet on a path to destruction and most alarming of all, that we stand in the way of some ‘natural order’ that would prevail if only we were not here.

Whether in science, religion or social theory we are painted as ‘fallen’ and in need of some outside source of ‘scientific objectivity’, or some

set of 'spiritual proscriptions' to overcome our flawed capabilities and sensibilities.

One might reasonably wonder how this perception of us has come to be so widely accepted, by what appears to be all forms of authority everywhere at once. It has become so entrenched that the belief in human frailty even permeates all of current scientific thinking and practice, particularly in the behavioral, psychological and cultural anthropological models which are applied to all interpretations of human motives and mores.

Rarely do we find champions proclaiming our important role here on earth and our remarkable success and achievements in harnessing our environment and beginning to control our lives and longevity. What we have achieved in such a short space of geologic time goes largely unnoticed. Everything about us is couched in the negative and we are vilified and positioned as if distinctly outside of the natural order and how things should be.

And yet we sprang from such a humble beginning and have traversed a mighty distance and near insurmountable challenges to arrive at who we are today, and we are young by any standard of planetary longevity and we are in a learning mode. This means that we do make many mistakes and as we grow we are attempting to learn from and correct those mistakes as we'll soon see and hopefully come to accept and respect.

The reasons for this anomaly of a virile self-loathing are many and varied and share a

common misunderstanding of who we are and what we are doing here. If we have hope of correcting this misunderstanding we need, first and foremost, to face the entrenched nature of this belief system and how it adversely affects human progress.

Perhaps a quick scan of our developmental history and an attempt to trace our path to who we have become today will help bring to light why such a dismal view of humanity's worth is both mistaken and misguided and even so, has become incorporated into virtually all scientific and religious theory and practice.

The story begins about 50 million years ago when a tiny salamander-like creature crawled out of its watery world and stepped ashore and began to explore the land. Why and what force drove this creature to make this enormous move we'll discuss later and may never fully understand. But for now let's continue to trace its steps on its arduous trek towards becoming human.

How many hundreds of thousands of years later and after successfully somehow surmounting the ever present predation and the disruptive changes to its form and function which marked its long journey towards becoming human, it so happened that on one particular day it decided or was forced to climb into a tree. This momentous move marked the onset of a multi-million year journey. During these countless epochs began the metamorphosis from thoughtless entity into an astute observer and master of its surroundings. We may never be able to reconstruct its entire history, but it did happen; and it was never easy.

Can you picture this in your mind's eye? Can you slow your thinking down to a quiet place where you can picture the arduous steps that etched our beginnings and which made us who we are today? Visualize a creature whose anatomy, locomotion, breathing and internal and external features and organs changed radically perhaps even miraculously over time, and you will begin to get a sense of the enormous struggle undergone by our forebears.

If you will take this time to reflect on this history, so difficult, so rare, so inspiring, then you will be prepared to begin our discussion of Spinoza's understanding of who and what we are. Let your mind create a picture and reproduction of the events during this period of our early development to help see why Baruch describes the basis of the human experience as a constant striving, (conatus); struggling to understand and to then manipulate our surroundings and environment .

Back to our story; once this creature developed the ability to grasp the fruits and other foodstuffs that supported this tree dweller and had mastered the stereoscopic vision and dexterity, perfected to achieve these tasks, it decided or was forced to step down onto the plains and the grasslands where it would undergo its most dramatic transformation ever experienced and onto what would become the incubator for Homo sapiens.

Many millennia later the little hominid began to develop and exhibit behaviors and skills that far outstripped those of its competitors for the mastery of available resources. Using its new found ability to closely observe and to interpret its environment and further, to communicate this

clearly to its other partners in the band, ideas about how to overcome and manage or destroy the enemy emerged and it steadily moved from hunted to hunter.

In fact it became the most effective hunter in history, eventually becoming the master of all and everything that inhabits this earth. As time went on and using this developing thinking function, the early humans began to apply rudimentary systems thinking to plan, strategize and tactically control the building of villages and communities which would eventually grow into kingdoms and empires.

The acquisition of the skill sets required to accurately record and to document events and to share this information with like-minded individuals allowed for the storage and transmission of this invaluable information in written form which allowed this early 'data' to spread over large distances and eventually through time.

One of the seminal and most significant recognitions occurred when early humans began to discern the presence of some sort of overarching power or potent cause that appeared to be the driver of nearly everything in their daily lives. The feeling of awe and inspiration that accompanied these events would eventually grow into a belief system replicated essentially everywhere humans flourished; that an unlimited and somehow eternal being must be responsible for everything in existence and the cause of all life.

Thus was God born on earth; a boon and a curse for all, even up to the present era, causing near

irreparable harm to our belief in our own self-worth.

This Capsule will end soon as it must. It is near time for us to begin our work and discourse on Spinoza's 'Fragment' which is the purpose behind this communication.

But first we must pause briefly to take a longer look at this birth of god on earth because it has directly impacted the prevalent negative view of us and will help us to understand the disparaging picture of humanity pointed out as this Capsule began.

Manifestations of this god person appear on all continents and within all cultures. The individual religions and sects that arose from this belief can be said to vary in their content and in their founder's message and instructions for devotees. And yet they all share a strange assessment of humans and our need for intercession from an almighty and its message to us of our fallibility and our need for redemption.

They each begin their tale with a revelation from the deity to a chosen individual who somehow communes directly with the divine and receives and encodes a set of instructions for those who wish to become true believers and followers. The most important element, for our purposes, is that they all hinge on one central fact; humans are inherently weak and in desperate need of 'being saved'.

At that period in our history it certainly was extremely important to somehow instill in us an urgent sense of purpose. It was clearly a civilizing

tool of the first magnitude and absolutely vital for our development. But for all its positives this belief in divine intervention has both outlived its usefulness as many of us see clearly and become detrimental towards our advancing our understanding to see clearly what has always been true.

There is not and never has been any divinity directing human activity. God did not reveal himself to us, it was in fact just the opposite, we found and created god.

It has always been we human beings who are the only developers and architects of human progress.

We are the only ones responsible for all the advances that have been made over these millennia of struggle. It is now the time for us to begin to accept the greatness in our achievements and to put aside our need for patriarchal guidance.

At this juncture it is critically important to note that the people who intuited god's existence and who formalized religions were not necessarily wrong. The understanding of god that Spinoza wishes for us to grasp has nothing to do with tossing religious beliefs and organized religions away.

In the 'Ethics' Baruch will introduce and expand upon the notion of 'Amor Dei Intellectus', or the intellectual love of god. The greatest achievement in any human life is to understand god as the infinite cause of all things that are possible and to recognize that we are a living representation of

god's attribute of thought, experienced through the extended world.

There is no greater gift than to understand the beauty and importance of life and our integral place in all of creation. 'Amor Dei Intellectus' is unlike nirvana or for any other longed for state which will overcome our sorry condition. It is the opposite of that .It amounts to an immersion in the reality of life itself and realizing that being alive is reward in itself. Having a life to live must be recognized as truly its own justification.

There is nothing else to strive for, no greater goal than to understand and accept our place and responsibility. We owe a debt to all who have come before us and a solemn responsibility to all who will follow.

And yet there are those of us who will always feel a need for the belief and the consolation which comes from thinking that an infinite being is driving and guiding events in our lives. This is not merely a crutch or a panacea.

Because it is based in an intuitive understanding that god is the cause of everything possible in the universe and the only cause, religious belief in the infinite is not off-mark by far. The awe and inspiration that first kindled the birth of god on earth was not misplaced, just somewhat misunderstood.

Once Spinoza helps us to clarify our understanding the same awe and inspiration remain. Only now we will come to see that there is no one or no real need to pray to someone or to ask for intercession or guidance. There is no one

to ask. God is not a person or an entity. God has no plan for us or anything else. God is the sum total of everything possible. Everything possible unfolds everywhere at once, without purpose but with a definite necessity and causality; this then is the true essence of the infinite.

We are experiencing life as the leading edge of that unfolding. We are not interlopers or aliens. We are an organic and active part of god's continuing creation and as we'll soon see we have been gifted with a piece of god's infinity that has served us so far for millions of years.

In our era it is developing into an understanding of the presence and power of the human mind. Spinoza will guide us and help us to begin to grapple with the enormity and responsibility that comes with the freely given 'Gift of Life'.

Enough of this... We had better get to work, now.

PRELIMINARIES AND A BIT OF BACKGROUND

Baruch Spinoza lived in the mid-seventeenth century in the Netherlands, at that time a place of unusual tolerance and acceptance of different cultures, that is, up to a point. There are a number of differing versions of his life recounted in the extant and most of them contain useful elements of what little we really know about Baruch, so each of us can choose for ourselves which one contains the most appeal.

Quite simply and for our purposes he lived a somewhat quiet life as a lens maker, a religious and political scholar and a well-known mathematician and scientist.

His writings often published anonymously, in political theory and the origin of religious belief and in deciphering the scriptures, came to be recognized as seminal thinking and were admired throughout European intellectual circles. They were widely disseminated and most famously adapted by none other than the author of the American “Declaration of Independence”, Thomas Jefferson.

He directly credited Spinoza as the originator of the notion of the ‘self evident’ nature of the truth. Thus the most famous line in the document emerged as, “We hold these truths to be self-evident that, all men are created equal”..., and became the core principle of the US Constitution.

We will soon revisit this concept of the truth being self-evident, one of Spinoza's key discoveries.

His masterwork, "Ethics Demonstrated in Geometrical Order" is as fine and as important a document as has ever been produced by any human mind. Nonetheless it is not widely known or apparently understood, hence the resounding silence on its merit and relevance for forwarding the continuing development of the human species.

Besides this neglect which has many explicable and understandable reasons the document itself is extremely difficult to penetrate and is surely a 'clear labyrinth'. The subject matter in part one, 'Concerning God' lays out a precise definition of god or nature and forms the basis of Spinoza's metaphysical discovery and understanding of the ultimate cause of everything at once in the entire universe. But for those of us with far humbler gifts than Baruch enjoyed, the 'Ethics' can simply appear obtuse and impenetrable.

A further difficulty resides in Spinoza's insistence that the true and accurate understanding of the universe and god which he is describing should be self-evident to any reader who studies and carefully considers his writing. This is not the common place meaning of 'self-evident'. It is more akin to a type of hindsight derived from careful observation and deep thought and recognition.

This complexity in his 'Part 1-Concerning God' brings us to the need for our discussion and illustration of what is commonly called the

‘Fragment’ or “On the Improvement of the Understanding”.

After some time and much reflection it became apparent that the ‘Fragment’, whether Baruch intended it so or not, holds the key elements for unlocking the “Ethics”. In it Baruch explains the structure and functions within the human mind and differentiates it from the imagination, plus how and why to work to separate the two of them. He will also clarify the nature of the ‘true’ or ‘adequate’ idea and the power of the mind to form ideas from nature.

Spinoza sets out the purpose of the document early on in the piece:

“What that character {consists of} we shall show in due time, namely, that it is the union existing between the mind and the whole of nature.” [Page 6]

Notice he does not say brain. The currently prevailing theory holds that humans are essentially mechanical beings and that by studying the pathways, receptors, and interactions within the brain alone, everything about us and our thinking function can be explained. Let’s just see about that as we move into the “Fragment”.

The focus for this forty plus page piece, called the “Fragment” is on his ‘method’ for clarifying our thinking and our ability to understand the world clearly. It also provides rare access for the reader to his thinking in simple language, because he declares at its outset that the “Fragment” is not to

be confused or taken as his philosophy. It is his most straightforward, even prosaic document.

Because he had such a faith in our ability to decipher his use of language, which though flattering to us may have been misplaced, he offered very few examples or illustrations in the document. Therefore we will need to create illustrations and examples of our own making to connect our personal experience and methods of reasoning so as to align us with the key concepts of his “method”.

Understanding Spinoza’s work is not just an academic reading exercise, it will require active participation on our parts. We will need to engage our minds in a very conscious process of recognizing how these concepts operate in our own thinking and daily lives. This will prove a painstaking and challenging exercise.

The illustrations presented in this pamphlet will not prove useful for every one of us. They are intended only as models to serve to assist each reader to create the unique illustrations that will reflect her or his individual experience.

The key point is to reach behind and through the illustration to recognize and understand Spinoza’s intent and which aspect in his ‘method’ needs to be grasped and made one’s own to use daily to effectively improve the understanding.

How we will proceed through the “Fragment”

Each of us will need a copy of the piece at hand. This will enable each reader to follow along with the discussion.

Each segment will begin with an italicized key concept or controlling idea of Spinoza’s words

from the 'Fragment'. We will then attempt to decipher and illustrate the concept together, page by page. Let us then begin.

SPINOZA'S 'FRAGMENT': "ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF THE UNDERSTANDING" A DISCOURSE AND ILLUSTRATION

Our Work

[Note well: It will be vital for each of us to have at least read 'The Fragment', "On the Improvement of the Understanding". This will make it possible to follow along in our discourse and illustration. The page numbers that will be displayed after each italicized section of Spinoza's words may not always be a direct match with each reader's copy. Since the Work is only 41-43 pages in length this should not prove onerous. It will help to have familiarity with the text so as to easily locate the segment under our consideration. For our work we are using the R.H.M. Elwes translation; Samuel Shirley or Stuart Hampshire's versions can also be used effectively as well.

In light of convenience and cost to the reader, "On the Improvement of the Understanding", is available as a free download on 'Project Gutenberg' and elsewhere.

We will not consider the document in its entirety, but will focus on the most challenging areas which

anticipate the major concepts that Spinoza expands upon in the “Ethics”.]

“After experience had taught me that all the usual surroundings of social life are vain and futile: seeing that none of the objects of my fears contained in themselves anything either good or bad, except in so far as the mind is affected by them, I finally resolved to inquire whether there might be some real good having power to communicate itself, which would affect the mind singly, to the exclusion of all else...”

With hindsight and after years of dedicated study of the Ethics it became clear that the simple statement above, called the Proemium (introductory comments), foreshadows the complete core of Spinoza’s philosophy, in synopsis.

That will not help someone who is approaching the piece for the first time. So let us take some time to see what we can glean from a closer look at the possible meaning of his words.

“After experience, etc.” his mention of the vainness and futility of the usual may sound like some ascetic statement wherein he rejects the trappings of life, this is not the case. What he is addressing here is his observation that what many people count as the highest goals in life, like fame and fortune, have no intrinsic value but merely reflect subjectively how much value a person places on them. Baruch’s use of the words *“...except insofar as my mind is affected by them”*, is the first mention of the concept ‘affected’. He here points out what will become the basis for Parts 3, 4 and 5 in the “Ethics”. For

Spinoza our minds and in fact most of our thoughts and behaviors are affected, in fact controlled by outside elements and people in our daily experience. He terms this our mind in a 'passive' state. The outside world controls our destiny. Human freedom, or having an 'active' mind puts us in charge of our thoughts and behaviors by overcoming and replacing the outside control with adequate understanding of our own nature.

"I finally resolved", etc. is the initial announcement of his goal: to determine if there is anything in human experience that can be known with certainty, something that needs no external prop or proof to be seen as clearly true. 'Finally...' is Baruch's recognition that to pursue reality is a full time responsibility not a part time leisure activity, a word to the wise here. By 'real good' he means something that in the absolute sense is True and available to us as a guide for correct action.

[NOTE- two pages on] *"All these evils seem to have arisen from the fact that happiness or unhappiness is made wholly to depend on the quality of the object that we love. When a thing is not loved no quarrels will arise concerning it- no sadness will arise if it perishes- no envy if it possessed by another- no fear, no hatred, in short no disturbances of mind"*.

This is fundamentally his core achievement in human psychology and the key and access point for us to begin to understand the influence in our lives and thought process that comes from our emotional response to an event or person and how their proximity or closeness to us

emotionally, plays a controlling role in how we will think and then react.

If a friend speaks of the passing of a dear relative and that they will be travelling a great distance to attend a memorial service, we will respond empathetically and actually feel a momentary sadness for our friend. Because we have never met this person that feeling will be essentially fleeting. This does not mean we are uncaring. Spinoza is simply describing how proximity plays the predominant role in our reaction.

If one of our close relatives passes away, that event will devastate us and affect our lives in the extreme. If we take the time to see this element of proximity operating in our daily lives we can begin to sort out those things that disturb us most, identify the source and decide what we can do about them.

Please bear in mind that unbundling the nexus where our emotions, thoughts and behaviors conjoin is no simple task. Yet the understanding and feeling of peace that comes from understanding just one event by identifying its source and the cause of the affect on us will permit us to slowly work through the next, and the next. Our ability to remain calm and resilient will grow exponentially over time. Let us be clear with one another, this is not a simple task. There is no end game. This will involve a life-long commitment. And there will be pain along the way for us as we try to unravel the complexity of our emotional nexus, as with *“all things difficult as they are rare”*.

"I will here only briefly state what I mean by true good, and also what is the nature of the highest good... The chief good is that he should arrive, together with other individuals if possible, at the possession of the aforesaid character. What that character is we shall show in due time, namely, that is the knowledge of the union existing between the mind and the whole of nature." [Page 6]

[Note- This is it, in these few lines lies Spinoza's metaphysical discovery; human beings are directly connected to and can access the entire 'Universe' through an extremely powerful thinking function, our mind, which uses the brain as an unlimited storage cell for all of our accumulated experience. This storage function or brain, serves as an unlimited database for the mind's research into any topic under our consideration. But how to depict it simply and clearly is the thorny issue that we will need to resolve together, here and now.

Picture a simple casual reverie that comes in a quiet moment. For no apparent reason we picture our Grandmother or any other person who is dear to us. Almost instantly we can see her house and remember the wonderful Sundays spent in her company. We see the family gathered in the kitchen and sense the anticipation for the excellent meal that she is preparing with great care and love.

The scene appears to be an exact and detailed replication of the actual dinner itself. With no conscious prompting on our part other associated memories flood into the reverie, like a special birthday cake or favorite dish which she prepared especially for us. Next appears unconnected

memories of other people and happy experiences we shared with them. When we 'awake' and no longer 'see' Grandmother or anyone else, we find ourselves sitting peacefully with a comforting sense of joy that pervades our senses.

We never seem to ask ourselves how this wonderful happening occurred or where it came from or anything about its meaning. In the typical daily scheme of things, there is no need for that. The whole event came to us without any prompting and with no apparent causality. This is a simple example of the power of the mind to form accurate ideas and to reproduce them.

Let's take this many steps further. After some careful active thought on our part on this and other similar reveries we begin to sense a pattern among the reveries although as yet we do not discern its' source, or again, any causality attached to the experiences. They appear unbidden and purely at random times and places.

It may be the case that the simple thought 'Grandmother' acts as an unconscious algorithm that 'calls up' the scenes.

Might it be possible for us to actively access others from these 'files' from our experience and use the collected information for a specific purpose, a type of research? Can we consciously pose pointed questions that will go beyond the scope of random daydreams? Let's look carefully into the possibility.

Among the current theories on human development one in particular exhorts us to attempt to harness the power of our subconscious

to solve difficult problems that cannot be tackled by any active analysis or thought process. Many people have experienced what is commonly termed that 'Eureka' moment' when a resolution to a thorny question in our work or research that has pre-occupied us over quite a long period of time suddenly 'pops' into our head. It often marks a breakthrough that allows us to move ahead on a project that was stalled. This is now commonly referred to as the subconscious mind at work. It holds the key to unlocking and consciously accessing the potential and near unlimited power of the human mind.

Spinoza's discovery of "... *the knowledge of the connection between our mind and the whole of nature*" which he exhorts us to pursue diligently may inspire us in our struggle to harness the power of the subconscious mind. We shall return to this question at the appropriate point and there continue our discussion. But for now let us return and continue to examine Baruch's words.] End Note.

What we know and the certainty we can attribute to that knowledge

"I will betake myself to the first and most important task, namely, the amendment of the understanding, and the rendering it capable of understanding things in the manner necessary for attaining our end. ... to bring this about, I should here recapitulate all the modes of perception, which I have hitherto employed for affirming anything with certainty, so that I may choose the best, and at the same time to begin to know my own powers and the nature which I wish to perfect." [Page 8]

Here the title, “On the Improvement of the Understanding”, begins to come into play. If we, as humans, do indeed participate in anything that can be said to be true in the absolute sense, then we need to demonstrate both what that is and how it is even possible. We do not typically identify the types and varieties of how we come to know something or what makes us ‘believe’ that what we know is true. But Baruch’s inventory of our varied perceptions will mark the starting point for our selecting the most useful mode of perception. So this breakdown may come as a bit of a surprise to some of us.

“All modes of perception or knowledge may be reduced to four;-

- 1. Perception arising from hearsay or from some sign which everyone may name as he pleases.*
- 2. Perception arising from mere experience- that is, from experience not yet classified by the intellect.*
- 3. Perception arising when the essence of one thing is inferred from another thing.*
- 4. Lastly, there is the perception arising when a thing is perceived solely through its essence, or through the knowledge of its proximate cause.”*

Let us examine his first example from the text, our birth. The only information we have on the day we were born is what our parents tell is at an early age to be the date on which we were born. No one ‘experiences’ that day as we experience reading this page. Each of us probably knows or has heard about someone who had need to verify their date of birth for some official purpose, only to

find that the day that they were actually born differs from the date they believed it to be. This is fairly common. It is not as though Spinoza wishes us to discard what we know through 'hearsay' but rather that he wants us to identify this type of knowing and to be careful not to make decisions on our beliefs and actions by using it alone.

The usefulness of recognizing hearsay comes as we develop the ability to stop judging others based on questionable inputs to our thinking. Over time it will prove more than small comfort to us.

For an illustration of the second type of perception consider a person, perhaps a well known politician, who lives a continent away and yet is in the public eye. We read in the media that the person is aloof and does not relate well to other people. Even though we have never been in this person's company we assume the report to be true, since we have no personal experience to contradict what's been reported.

We simply accept as true this type of item and many others concerning people and events which come to us secondhand and about which we have not given much conscious reflection. This reflects *"...experience not yet classified by the intellect"*.

Accepting the veracity of these types of experience with which we have no direct exposure using this second type of perception serves no useful purpose for us and should be filed within those things which we imagine to be true. Spinoza would find forming an opinion about this person or event to be a waste of time and energy.

It is important to note here that Baruch is not trying to disparage what we believe but simply to categorize the different ways we come to believe things, so as to explore the possibility if there is anything we know that can be counted on to be reliable and certain in all circumstances.

In Baruch's third mode of perception we come across his first mention of cause and effect. Later on he will elaborate upon his realization that confusing causes from effects and 'imagining' that we understand something, when in fact we do not, is the biggest barrier for us as we strive to grasp what is real and to separate it from what is a product of the imagination.

We need to carefully assess the impact and implications within the following difficult sentence.

"We deduce one thing from another as follows: when we clearly perceive that we feel a certain body and no other, we thence clearly infer that the mind is united to the body, and that their union is the cause of the given sensation; but we cannot thence absolutely understand the nature of the sensation and the union." [Note- page 9]

[Centuries before Spinoza's time, around 1650, philosophers pondered and often argued over the existence of a type of separation between an individual person's mind and body. They could feel some difference within their own experience of mind and body but were unable to capture its essence. The quest continued up until the nineteenth century when the question finally was 'debunked' as a useless proposition.

Since then it has been nearly universally accepted that humans have no such function as a mind and that the study of the body and brain will suffice to explicate everything occurring in human experience. The current scientific community unanimously holds to the belief that humans are no different in any meaningful way from any other animal and that everything about us can be explained through a mechanistic/behavioral frame. Spinoza's work was conveniently bypassed in this assumption.]

It is certainly true that the existence of the mind is a bedeviling prospect. But those of us who understand the concept must press on and explain as clearly as possible both the existence of and the relationship between mind and body. Spinoza has shown the way. It is for us to follow his lead.

Let us return to the challenge at hand. Here is in Baruch's words, another way to depict the union between our minds and bodies. This segment is contained in the "Ethics" Part 2 - Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind, Proposition 13.

"The object of the Idea constituting the human mind is the body, in other words a certain mode of extension which actually exists, and nothing else."

Here is one more proposition from Part 2 that will help us.

Proposition 19 - *"The human mind has no knowledge of the body, and does not know that it exists, save through the ideas of the modifications whereby the body is affected."*

The italicized statement above beginning with “*We deduce...*” and Proposition 13 and 19 are in fact three complementary ways of saying the same thing; that there is a distinct and noticeable difference between our individual experience of our mind and of our body.

One might suggest at this point that this complementary element does not necessarily leap from the page. We will need to identify the relationship among the three statements to make some sense for ourselves and identify ways in which to make their meaning clear to each one of us on our own terms. It will require some transliteration as well if we are to access the core meaning for us. One hint; this has nothing to do with the so called ‘duality of mind and body.’

We experience our mind and our body in distinguishably different ways

As if we are not already having enough fun in our discussion, let’s have a little quiz. Let us assume that you are seated comfortably and in a relaxed frame of mind, if so then please answer the following questions with either a Yes, a No or Do not know.

Is your blood pressure currently in the recommended safe range and can you consciously feel that pressure? What is your body temperature right now?

Are your intestines free and clear and absent any blockages whatsoever?

Are B complex and E vitamins being extracted from your colon and are the other essential nutritional elements being extracted during the process of digestion?

Is your digestion and nutrition system in balance, do you need to adjust your eating habits and diet? Does your stomach separate the nutritive elements from the waste properly?

Does your brain receive the proper mixture of oxygen and blood? Do you have any feeling whatsoever inside your skull or feel any of its synaptic activities?

Is your strongest sense of consciousness located somewhere behind your eyes and centered in your head with some relationship to your inner ear?

If you answered, No or Do not know to the first eight questions and Yes to the last one; congratulations, you are exactly like the rest of us. The question will arise as to the purpose of our little quiz and how it might connect with the three quotations above it.

Humor aside this little demonstration is intended to remove some of the mystery from the Spinoza's words and to serve as an example of our own relationship with our bodies.

We do indeed have a very different relationship with our thinking function than that with our body. The mind feels more alive and immediate to our apperception and appears to have no physical limitations. We can cast our thoughts in any direction we wish, from far outer space to the depths of the sea. And yet we seem to lack any connection in immediate consciousness to any of our bodily functions, that is, until we experience a local discomfort, like: a stomach disturbance, headache or some emotional response that triggers a bodily sensation.

Although this closer look at the third type of perception and how we ascertain the union of our mind and body may prove useful for us as we move towards our goal, in order to recognize the best way to improve our understanding of what is true we need to move on now.

There remains the fourth and final mode of perception, through which we are able to perceive a thing solely through its essence or its proximate cause. This concept is indeed the most difficult to understand of the four modes. It contains within it the core element of Baruch's metaphysical discovery, that anything we experience directly in nature and with immediacy will be that which can be accessed by the understanding and therefore can be counted on to involve certainty. This discovery of what is true in the realm of human experience stands him apart from any other thinker, past or present.

He is truly the world's first and only metaphysician.

[Note - a very dear friend recently shared that as she struggled to understand Spinoza's words it sometimes required reading and re-reading a sentence up to forty times before his intended meaning became clear. So it is that we too will require the exercise of great patience and perseverance if we are to be successful in our studies.]

To reiterate, *"... there is the perception arising when a thing is perceived solely through its' essence, or through the knowledge of its proximate cause"*.

A young person while observing the lovely white blossoms on an apple tree in her garden, over time begins to realize that the flowers eventually somehow become shiny, red and most delicious fruit. Fascinated by the process the young observer begins to realize that not only the flower and the fruit have some important relationship but that other elements appear to act in concert and actually to help in the development of the resultant delicacy. By closely observing the tree in early spring she begins to notice that small insects visit virtually every young blossom and that an exchange of some sort occurs.

Tracing back to late winter she sees the little insects as they seem to awaken from some type of slumber and to scurry aimlessly beneath the tree. Gradually she notices that as the sun begins to arc higher in the sky each day the insects become more agitated and begin to inhabit the small bushes around the base of the tree. Finally she recognizes how the growing warmth from the sun allows the insects to gain flight and rise up into the tree where the elaborate exchange takes place between the insects and the blossoms. The result becomes her favorite treat, a fully developed and most delicious apple.

She recognizes after reflecting on what she observed over time that the sun seemed to be a sort of cause or trigger for the entire process.

The above illustration constitutes an example of what Spinoza has termed; "*perception arising when a thing is understood solely through its essence or through the knowledge of its proximate cause*".

Let's expand on this a bit more. The child's observation of an event in nature constitutes what Spinoza will go on to define in the "Ethics" as 'reflective knowledge' gained from the intrinsic natural relationship existing between humans and the extended world.

The chain of events that the young person recognized, form an example of the 'interconnected' nature of objects (an apple) and ideas (the girl's thoughts), they are both the same thing even though they are experienced in two distinct forms, the apple as an object in extension and the idea of the apple in her mind. She recognizes through her non-conscious application of 'intuitive understanding' that the sun is the 'proximate' cause of the apple, and this allows her to glimpse the 'essence' of the fruit.

Nothing in this process required the use of making reference to any written material on apple trees or any deliberate conscious effort whatsoever on her part. The experience was simultaneous, immediate and essentially instantaneous. This experience may serve as an example of Spinoza's fourth way of knowing things in our experience. It is the way of gaining knowledge that he will select as the only one of the four modes which allows for certainty.

Finally and most importantly, the entire process from the sun's warmth to the end product; an apple, can be said to represent a series of adequate ideas clearly conceived, that is, true. The truth derives from the fact that the tree and the apple are both objects in the natural order of

things, not abstractions or generalizations about fruit.

We shall next move on to the crux of the entire 'Fragment' and the concept that lies at the heart of Spinoza's discovery of 'Reality'; the nature of a True Idea. [Page-12]

"A true idea (for we possess a true idea) is something different from its correlate (ideatum); thus a circle is different from the idea of a circle. The idea of a circle is not something having a circumference and a center, as a circle has; nor is the idea of a body that body itself. Now as it is something different from its correlate, it is capable of being understood through itself; in other words, the idea, in so far as its actual essence (essentia formalis) is concerned, may be the subject of another subjective essence (essentia subjectiva)."

This is the focal point of our entire discussion on the power of the mind and the concept which makes Baruch's philosophy unique in the entire history of human thinking. It is also the key element for unlocking and understanding the complexity within the language of the "Ethics" and represents the next phase in our evolutionary development; recognizing and accepting the existence of the 'mind' and the marvel contained in its innate capability to make sense of and to grasp clearly the essence of the truth in nature.

To paraphrase the quotation above, an apple (from our previous illustration of the young person's observation of the growing cycle of the apple tree) is not the same as the idea of an apple. They are correlates, one in the realm of extension or experience, the other in the realm of

thought or thinking. Yet they remain distinct, the one cannot 'affect' the other.

To grow and to then eat an apple is clearly not the same as thinking about and thus coming to comprehend how to grow an apple tree. But they share something very important, an interlocked relationship as two distinct attributes of nature.

If an experienced apple grower creates a training pamphlet entitled 'How to cultivate and grow an apple orchard' they will have transformed the essence of apple growing into an 'idea'. This idea is now transferable to another human mind.

An aspiring grower who carefully follows each of the steps in the pamphlet and who produces apples has taken advantage of the mind's ability to faithfully capture a reality, convert it into idea format, and then transform that idea into a natural object, a piece of fruit.

To expand this segment, let us attempt to paraphrase one of Spinoza's illustrations of the power of an idea, the idea of Peter on page 13. Be sure to read carefully Baruch's story of Peter first and furthermore to decide for yourself the intended meaning of his illustration.

As was stated at the outset of our dialogue, to understand the 'Fragment' is not simply a reading and comprehension exercise. It is vital for each of us to make Baruch's words come alive in our own mind by creating our own personal illustrations when and where necessary.

Whenever Baruch mentions the term 'objects', typically to focus us on our need to pay close

attention to the subject matter of inquiries into nature, he is not only referring to inanimate objects but to everything within the ken of our living experience. This includes people and all of the flora and fauna as well. Please note this well.

And now for Peter; a close friend of ours tells us that his best friend is coming for a visit. He begins to tell us about Peter and how close they have grown over the years. He talks in great detail about his friend; his habits, mannerisms and personality. We begin to form for ourselves our own image and idea of Peter in our mind, even though we have never met him.

A number of weeks later, our friend requests of us that we meet Peter at the train in his place, since he will be working all day. We readily agree and proceed to the station at the appointed time. Once Peter arrives and we join in conversation with him, and as we move through the day, a strange impression begins to come over us.

We begin to feel as if we'd already known Peter before. His appearance and mannerisms, even his voice and sense of humor and his personality all seem very familiar. Our experience with him appears to be a match for the description which we were given previously. In an odd way we feel as if we'd already met Peter before.

Spinoza explains this by the following statement:

"The man Peter is something real; the true idea of Peter is the reality of Peter represented subjectively, and is in itself something real and quite distinct from the actual Peter" [Page 13]

The Truth, Reality and Subjective Essence are virtual equivalencies. We experience them directly with no filtering as a gift at birth.

“Hence it is clear that certainty is nothing else than the subjective essence of a thing: in other words, the mode in which we perceive an actually reality [Peter and the apple] is certainty. Further it is also evident that, for the certitude of truth, no further sign is necessary beyond the possession of a true idea.” [Bottom page 13]

[Please note- Spinoza’s use of the word ‘subjective’ does not correspond in any way to today’s pejorative connotation; something flawed, not able to be measured. What he intends for its meaning is the mind’s equivalent experience in the form of ideas to any object in nature.]

Nature is our teacher, our educator and the proper and only acceptable subject matter for all of our inquiries into what is real. Nature automatically and indelibly imprints within our brain mechanism virtually everything in the range of our experience, providing a vast and nearly unlimited store of subject matter for our research and development. Spinoza terms this *“experience not yet classified by the mind.”*

This does not however mean that we will gain automatic access to this virtually unlimited store of captured experiential information without conscious effort.

What Baruch is explaining to us in the ‘Fragment’ and allowing us to access is the capability within the mind to harness the power of our as yet only

rudimentarily developed 'reflective knowledge and intuitional thinking' functions.

Absorbing and understanding his 'method', carefully laid out in the 'Fragment', will allow us to synthesize, analyze and organize the gathered raw data into useful and applicable chains of interconnected adequate ideas. This is the process by which we have learned all that we know. Baruch is merely detailing the operating procedure between the brain and the mind that allows for learning to occur. Understanding this learning process and taking on the capability to apply it consciously will provide us with the proper platform for a serious contemplation of the subject matter in the 'Ethics', our stated goal for this discussion. It also conforms to the end goal for Baruch's 'Fragment'; the 'improvement of the understanding'.

We already perform this 'classification' operation, albeit unknowingly.

By way of a simple illustration, remember when we began to study arithmetic. At first our teachers had us apply the rudimentary and rote learning process of memorizing the times tables and the simple addition and subtraction of numbers. Having mastered those we moved on to fractions and percentages. Along the way we began to experience the sense of accumulating tools that we could apply in a predictable way. This afforded us the ability to solve word problems and the like.

Next we tackled simple algebra and the next step in the process, plane geometry.

Those of us who enjoyed the accumulated learning then went on to the more challenging

study of the differential calculus. From there the path led to advanced mathematics topics such as trigonometry, theoretical and particle physics, chaos theory and the more purely conceptual fields. A few of us would have gone on to pursue advanced degrees culminating in a doctoral program in mathematics.

Along the way, in Spinoza's terminology, we were accumulating longer and more complex chains of interconnected ideas that eventually allowed us to participate in an advanced stage of intuitional understanding.

This experience opened up a new world where mathematics becomes a tool for the creation of new worlds and extremely complicated structures. Some of these musings have allowed fascinating and eventually useful applications to emerge in the real world, such as astrophysical observations which culminated in space travel, as well as advanced robotics and nanotechnologies.

The same process of determined effort over time to amass interlocked chains of ideas is also a requisite building block in all other fields of human endeavor as well, from training as a fighter pilot to becoming a successful agriculturalist or even a capable philosopher.

So it is then that Spinoza's discovery of the mind will not turn our worlds into some newly created reality never before experienced by anyone or relegate all that we know to some dustbin. Rather it will provide us a hard won, clear and adequate depiction of how the learning process accumulates over time and how each of us can consciously control our own destiny.

What each of us will gain is a new perspective on the marvelous and organic connection between our experience of the extended world and the human mind. We will also gain an explicit understanding of the enormous and nearly unlimited capacity of our mind's ability to study and to learn from the extended universe, as Baruch intends for us in his 'method'. What wonderful developments will arise from this new understanding will be up to each of us to explore and to share with the like-minded in our particular field of human endeavor.

We have just illustrated one example of how the mind develops new and improved tools and skills to master complexity in the academic realm [that is the learning path for the mathematics student], by applying the innate power of the mind along with intuitional understanding.

There is another much more profound application of this process which we need to examine which is far beyond the scope of professional mastery and that is the realm of 'wisdom'. Our question now will become; what is wisdom, how is it achieved and how do we recognize it?

The knowledge acquired by the master of the arts and sciences is typically displayed in a demonstration of their accumulated capabilities, either in teaching others or in some form of written exposition. But what of wisdom; how is it gained, displayed and recognized by others and what practical purpose, if any, does it serve? If Spinoza is correct in claiming that each of us has access to the truth, (*"for we possess a true idea"*), by inference this indicates that all human beings

have the same access to the wealth of 'reflexive knowledge'* available through our daily experience in life [the idea of Peter and of the apple]. What other ways does this 'intuitional understanding' manifest itself? How can it be recognized by others? How was it accumulated, and if possible to comprehend, why?

*[A certain liberty has been taken here and throughout our dialogue. Spinoza's term 'reflective knowledge' has been slightly altered to become 'reflexive knowledge'. The change is meant to emphasize the highly active relationship between our minds and experience. We are not passive receptors of inputs from the external world as behavioral science claims. We are interactive agents in an exchange process; we impinge on nature even as it shares its inputs with us. Without this important and unique relationship, human knowledge would not be possible to explain.]

To readily experience wisdom in its natural setting, we need to travel to places where formal education or structured academic training is virtually non-existent; to a place where no written materials or media connection has ever existed. From those of us who have been privileged enough to visit and to live among the peoples of very ancient cultures who dwell in remote and barely accessible regions of the world in the deep forest, similar experiences have been reported. Usually these interstices occur when we come upon a tiny village with virtually no amenities save a small stream for obtaining water for drinking and firewood for cooking whatever can be foraged nearby. Typically this life will include the use of

animal hides for clothing and grasses and forest material for dwellings.

This is also a world where a deep and abiding understanding of the natural surroundings and an explicit and in depth knowledge of how to handle the enormous dangers faced by everyone daily is the vital and only tool available for the never ending struggle to survive.

Typically the visitor's encounter begins when a local guide brings us to the heart of a tiny hamlet completely fringed by deep forest. There a small group will be sitting in silence, each person somehow focused on one woman or man who is clearly the leader. As we approach the revered one and look upon her or his face, we find our gaze locked onto a pair of eyes the likes of which we have never experienced before. They look back at us, serene and calm, and yet with a look so penetrating that our automatic response is to clasp our hands together and to bow reverentially as does a supplicant. Some type of overwhelming power appears to emanate from deep within them and we immediately realize that we are in the presence of an ancient and unspoken wisdom. This is not a dream or illusion of wisdom and neither is the reverence shown by the other villagers.

There are even instances for those of us who have never even accessed the remote reaches of the deep forest which can be a similitude for the real time experience detailed above. For example, while watching a travel documentary, the viewer experiences a similar reaction of awe when the videographer's camera brings their line of sight directly into that same penetrating gaze of an elder. The sense of experiencing an overpowering

wisdom is palpable and can be felt. We shall explore the meaning behind these types of encounters further along in our work and touch upon the nature and development of human wisdom at that juncture.

The illustration above of the elders exuding an explicit sense of a deeply ingrained wisdom serves as a fine example of a natural and organic manifestation of what Spinoza terms 'amor dei intellectus', the intellectual love of god. As we will discover in the 'Ethics' Baruch holds this to be a human's highest and most intensely experienced joy and the desired goal for aspiring to a serene and accomplished lifetime; to simply understand life.

[Note- These two illustrations; the first an explicit depiction of the learning maturation of a mathematics student and the second an implicit depiction of the sensation of wisdom given off through the eyes of the elder villager, represent micro-expressions of accumulated chains of adequately understood and interconnected ideas derived through 'reflexive knowledge'. In themselves, these examples are intended to serve as prompts for each of us to begin to develop in our minds some recognition of how 'reflexive knowledge' and 'intuitional understanding' work in concert to develop interconnected ideas that form vast chains that operate as tools for daily use in our personal sphere.

And in some limited way they can help us to begin to grasp what Baruch means by *"the knowledge of the union existing between the mind and the whole of nature."*

But the limited perspective these illustrations afford us must be enlarged beyond the micro-reach of isolated instances of the interconnection of 'objects' and 'ideas'. We must work ceaselessly to apply our mind's ability to move beyond the everyday world of the known and familiar, beyond the limits of physical experience if we are to gain the perspective that will be required to fully comprehend the enormity of Spinoza's discovery. That is of the core elements of human experience, laid out in the 'Ethics'.

In order to expand and build towards the macro-reach in perspective that will enable us to experience for ourselves this interconnectivity we will need to apply this type of thinking to all of the areas within our own realm of experience in our daily lives.

Just as in our simple example of the growth cycle of the apple tree which came to light over an extended period of time and through patient and careful observation and absorption by the young person's mind there sprang a recognition of the action of a 'proximate cause' [the sun].

We need to stretch our thinking beyond the realm of those items that we can feel, touch, taste and see to include: weather and wind patterns in the upper atmosphere, the movement of oceans and land masses, planetary formation, the orbit and mind numbing speed of the earth in its rotation around the sun and the like.

We will soon be touching on these subject matters as we progress in our dialogue, but for now we need to move along to the overarching theme of the 'Fragment'. That is Baruch's method

for improving and strengthening our ability to understand and manipulate reality. End Note]

Our ability to experience ‘reality’ as an ‘idea’ in our thinking function demonstrates the existence of god as everything that is possible

“The true method does not consist in seeking for the signs of truth after the acquisition of the idea, but the true method teaches us the order in which we should seek for truth itself, or the subjective essence of things, or ideas, for all these expressions are synonymous. Again, method must necessarily be concerned with reasoning or understanding-I mean, method is not identical with reasoning in the search for causes, still less is it the comprehension of the causes of things: it is the discernment of a true idea, by distinguishing it from other perceptions, and by investigating its nature, in order that we may thus know our power of understanding.

“Whence we may gather that method is nothing else than reflective knowledge, or the idea of an idea; and as there can be no idea of an idea-unless an idea exists previously,-there can be no method without a pre-existent idea. Therefore that will be a good method which shows us how the mind should be directed, according to the standard of the given true idea.” [Top Page 14]

[Note-Before we begin to attempt to dissect this most challenging concept of ‘Truth’ virtually discovered by Spinoza [and no one else], a little background and comparison is in order. A near contemporary of Baruch who wrote a bit before his time was one of those who postulated what came to be known as ‘the scientific method’,

which is currently applied worldwide and serves as the standard for obtaining 'objective truth'. It involves establishing external proof for hypotheses.

This is not the time and place to investigate the relative merits of this approach, which is termed 'logical positivism' or empiricism. For us what is most important to note is that the Frenchman's conclusion is the antithesis of Spinoza's and essentially the source of the scientific communities' belief that "human perception is flawed" and stands in need of an outward sign or objective source of proof to substantiate any postulate or supposition.

For now our only goal is to understand what Spinoza means by method and truth. Again it cannot be overstated that without reaching a clear understanding for each of us, as individuals, of his definition of truth and its connection to what is 'infinite', Part 1 of the "Ethics" will prove impenetrable. So the time spent dissecting and comprehending the 'Fragment' will be well spent indeed.]

Let us try then to cull Baruch's meaning of 'truth' from the italicized statement above.

As we recall from a previous example, the only source necessary for our young friend to understand the proximate cause of the growing cycle of the apple was the apple itself and her careful observations of a process over time. She did not need to refer to a book or to consult an 'expert'. The apple and the idea she formed in her mind acted in concert to form her adequate understanding of a chain of ideas.

This is an explicit example of the power and inherent connectivity of the human mind with nature and the external world. Our minds have the capacity to automatically imprint from nature an exact duplicate of whatever we turn our attention towards during our focused observations. Once an 'object' or 'idea' is captured by our brain mechanism it can then be retrieved so that we can study, analyze, categorize and draw conclusions about the 'subjective essence' of the items under consideration.

Do notice that this process is not unlike the scientific method but differs immensely in that it does not require any abstract theorem or external proof to stand in its support. *"The truth requires no sign"*. It is self evidently true. Spinoza will later define this facet of self evidence in the "Ethics" and how that without this principle of self-evident truth, we humans would not have the capacity to experience anything that is true using any method whatsoever.

"Method is not identical with reasoning in the search for causes... it is the discernment of a true idea." [Middle page 14]

To extrapolate a bit; to adequately understand objects in nature is not about asking ourselves questions about them or setting up a mechanical apparatus to study them. It is purely and simply to absorb the meaning that constitutes our innate and organic connection with them.

When we relax on the beach and absentmindedly look at the ocean and see and feel the action of

the waves and the feel of the sun and of the seabirds' screeching and the salt air on our bodies, we come away with a sense of satisfaction that is not made up of words or conscious thoughts. It is rather a sense that our body and mind have been permeated with the amalgam of all these elements that surround our experience of the ocean. This experience corresponds, albeit roughly, to how we absorb the reality within everyday objects in experience.

“As there can be no idea of an idea-unless an idea exists previously,-there can be no method without a pre-existent idea.”

Here Spinoza is applying language and logic to describe something that words have never captured before.

Remember the friend who remarked that she sometimes needed to read and reread one of Baruch's sentences up to forty times? This is certainly one of those times.

As a capsule of what has preceded; Reality and the truth it contains are demonstrated beyond doubt by the simple fact that a finite creature, a single human being, can experience and understand what truth means through a capability that each of us possesses at birth. This is enormously difficult to absorb and will take some time to get accustomed to, but well worth the effort. What follows is Baruch's method for expressing essentially the same thing.

“A true idea must necessarily first of all exist in us as a natural instrument; and when this idea is apprehended by the mind, it enables us to

understand the difference existing between itself and all other perceptions. In this, one part of method exists.” [Pages 14-15]

As for the other part of ‘method’:
“The more the mind knows the better does it understand its own strength and the order of nature; by increased self- knowledge, it can direct itself more easily, and lay down rules for its own guidance; and, by increased knowledge of nature, it can more easily avoid what is useless. This is the sum total of method.”

How can we make sense of Infinity, something without beginning or end?

Thinking that Spinoza’s concepts which we have tried to decipher so far in our previous work are difficult to grasp and to make our own will not prepare us for the enormity of what follows. This seemingly harmless sentence below, and what follows it, contains in brief what encapsulates the heart and soul of Spinoza’s discovery of the timeless nature of the universe.

If infinity can be defined as all that is possible in a universe that is unfolding everywhere and at all times without purpose, and further, if we are truly on the leading edge of one of these possibilities, what sense can we make of this?

In order to approach this enormity using a step by step methodology we must examine these twin correlates which we experience, and decipher, both what they constitute and how their relationship operates in our human sphere.

"We may add that the idea in the world of thought is in the same case as its correlate in the world of reality.

If there be anything in nature which is without connection with any other thing, and if we assign to it a subjective essence, which would in every way correspond to the objective reality, the subjective reality would have no connection with any other ideas-in other words, we could not draw any conclusion with regard to it.

On the other hand, those things which are connected with others-as all things that exist in nature-will be understood by the mind." [Middle Page 15]

[Note - On page 6 in his opening remarks Baruch introduces us to a type of understanding that he would like us to attain to, *"namely, the knowledge of the union existing between the mind and the whole of nature."*

He has now brought us to a point in the 'Fragment' where we will begin to uncover the mechanism within each of us that allows this union to function on separate but equal terms with all things in nature. In a moment we will bring his concept of 'correlates' in to focus.

As prelude to this let's first briefly return to our Capsule that begins our "Letters to No one in Particular." In it we traced an outline of our forebearers' development, from salamander like creature to tree dweller and eventually into human form. We do not need to inquire into the causes of this morphology to appreciate the enormity involved in the development of a creature that over time took on completely different external

shape, internal organs and appendages, along with the attendant capabilities to manipulate its environment as it evolved into a thinking being. But we do need to reflect thoughtfully on this change and appreciate the implications for us today.

What has developed within our thinking function that enables us to grasp the essentials of reality or nature or 'extension', for they are synonymous? And further, how can we describe and understand our organic relationship with the external world which allows us to have certainty in the truth of those ideas which we have formed after careful reflection?

As an adjunct to this; is there any reason to assume that the transformation that began 50,000,000 years ago and underwent nearly impossible to grasp permutations since then, has been completed, with us as the final product in the development process? Should we consider ourselves as an endgame to evolution?]

The relationship between mind and body

Baruch begins his investigation of the source of human faculty in the only logically possible place, his own mind and body. After all, if no accommodation for human participation is included in any given theory of knowledge, then all that can be derived is an obtuse abstraction, like empiricism.

He states; *"when we clearly perceive that we feel a certain body and no other, we thence clearly infer that the mind is united to the body, and that their union is the cause of the given sensation;*

but we cannot thence absolutely understand the nature of the sensation and the union.” [Page 9]

The question arises then, what is this union and why the distinction made between mind and body? Thus we have arrived at the ‘correlates’. Spinoza clearly understood that there was something distinctly different in his relation to his mind and body. We illustrated this previously in our little quiz.

It must be noted that this distinction relates in some manner to the ‘mind/body duality’ question, which, though never resolved satisfactorily, was ultimately solved by Baruch.

For Spinoza the distinction between our experience of mind and body is real, evident and unavoidable for any theory of human knowledge. What sense did Baruch make of this distinction? He recognized that within the union existing within the human form two separate, yet equal experiences were occurring simultaneously, he described them as ‘correlates’, one he termed ‘extension’, the other ‘thought’. Further they must be understood as two distinct manifestations of god’s ‘infinite attributes’.

In part 2 of the “Ethics”, ‘Of the Nature and Origin of the Mind’, he will go into minute detail on what precisely he means by ‘infinite attributes’. Right here and now though we need to try to frame for ourselves some understanding of how two separate experiences can exist and operate within each of us. That is if we hope to make enough sense to entice others to join us in our discourse and goal to make Baruch’s work accessible.

A universe of infinite possibilities as 'functions' of nature

[Note-The following segment is a synopsised transliteration of the first section from Baruch's Part 1, 'Concerning God' in the "Ethics". It is inserted here in support of our attempt to understand what Baruch intends by 'correlates'.

His definitions on page 1, in descending order: "Self-caused, finite after its kind, substance, attribute, mode and, being absolutely infinite"; have been replaced in today's terminology, in the same ordering as above by: infinite universe, finite subsets, endless possibilities without purpose, functions and, unlimited set of evolving possibilities. None of these terms bears a precise definitive relationship with Baruch's choice of terminology. They are simplifications in today's lexicon that may prove easier for us to comprehend.

We will study together Part 1 of the 'Ethics' as the subject matter of Pamphlet 2 which will follow this current one.]

If a working definition of an infinite universe as constituting endless possibilities without a pre-designed cause, can be taken as our starting point here, and further, if life on earth can be posited as representing one of the developing modifications of substance or god, and as a finite subset of substance, originating from all of these possibilities; then we may proceed with our inquiry into the twin 'correlates' of mind and body; for Baruch, thought and extension.

The endless possibilities mentioned above, which we have the capability to recognize intuitively at

work in the limitless universe, are not just concepts or categories in the mind but actually can be described as functions of the universe that act as drivers for many different and varied types of activities.

Actions like the birth of stars and the planets and moons that surround them, the placement and development of massive solar systems and the final and inescapable self destruction of these systems into black holes, along with other observations of current day astrophysicists, fall under this realm of the possible as well.

At a very tiny, finite and micro-level, life on earth can be described and thought of in similar fashion. The development of the micro-organisms that began the cycle of birth and death of all the fauna and flora on earth, including humans, can be thought of as individual interconnected functions emanating from the working of a limitless set of evolving possibilities. As a demonstration of the cyclical nature of these possibilities some reach dead ends: dinosaurs and other extinct species, some land masses and what were termed inland seas, early plant life and so on, all came to an end.

Is it possible to include thinking as one of these universal functions, rather than viewing it as an evolutionary happenstance occurrence only in humans? Evidence points to the ability of the major mammals, like elephants, exhibiting prodigious feats of memory and intelligence spanning years and passing through countless generations.

The ever energetic and peripatetic Athenian, the only other metaphysician besides Baruch, posited

that... *“Animals do possess intelligence but have no means to express it”*.

If we can approach the ‘correlates’ of ‘thought’ and ‘extension’ as planetary functions, and not only an evolutionary happenstance unique to humans, then we can begin to discuss Spinoza’s recognition and definition of the nature of our human experience as incorporating these two distinct infinite attributes that conjoin within us.

As for the interconnected nature of all things in nature which Spinoza stresses again and again; our current scientific community has reported on but not yet recognized the significance of the fact that the building blocks, present and active in star formation and all other cosmological development, bear a chemically proportional relationship to those that served as building blocks for the human form. Along with everything else on earth and in slightly different amalgamations, these distillates serve today as nutritional constituents in all of the agricultural products which we consume daily.

We experience two of nature’s endless possibilities in the correlates of ‘thought’ and ‘extension’.

To conclude this segment on ‘interconnectedness’ and ‘correlates’ we will need to drill down and to concentrate our focus on exactly how our twin capacities of thought and extension experienced in tandem and simultaneously within each one of us, affords us the potential capability to access and experience the truth of reality.

Spinoza stresses again and again the interconnected nature of ideas [objects in extension] and thoughts [our thinking faculty/mind]. This interconnectedness is what allows us to participate actively in nature and to understand its reality. It has manifested itself recurrently in our capacity to identify and to recognize the dynamic and repetitive systems of patterns evident in nature.

Throughout human history astute observers and thinkers have noticed and reported on patterns and observable systems. The earliest noted patterns were in animal habits and migrations that permitted the tribes to track and to hunt with success and to be sustained. Later the budding agriculturalists noted repeated patterns in the soil and weather conditions such as seasonal changes, rainfall amounts, periods of dryness, planting successions of varying seed types and resulting crop yields and so on. These recognized interconnections allowed for systematic planting and harvesting schedules to be developed.

The great ocean explorers observed and marked patterns in the consistent and recognizable ocean currents, along with wave patterns and how the ocean directly affects the interaction between the land and the sea directly affect the weather onshore. These observations allowed for formalized charting, mapping and sophisticated navigation methods to be developed. This permitted the creation of sea lanes where ships gained the ability to cover great distances conveying enormous amounts of cargo in relative safety.

It has long been understood that the phases of the moon as it follows its trajectory around the earth control the changing daily and seasonal tidal patterns, producing huge bulges and troughs on the ocean surface and affecting wind and weather.

Consistently and over the course of many centuries our ability to recognize patterns and their connectivity has expanded exponentially.

We have now come to the realization that our sun, from the remote distance of 98 million miles away, holds sway over most human activities, many of which we are just becoming aware. Forces like the solar flare-ups and magnetic storms which occur with some regularity can produce one million mile an hour plus winds which emanate from the sun's surface. These tremendous forces affect our electronic and electric power delivery systems to such an extent, that safeguards are now being developed to shield and protect them.

These solar perturbations not only reach the surface of the planet but penetrate completely through its bulk and effectively through our bodies as well, with no as yet discernible negative effects. [Note well - Caution must be the watchword while investigating this particular phenomenon.]

As an eminent scientist and observer nonpareil, Baruch intimately intuited these patterns and our mind's capability to understand and to derive benefits from coming to understand these interconnected forces in nature. He correctly deduced from these observations that these

forces form the bedrock that serves as the foundation for all human life and scientific knowledge.

If we can bear in mind all of these patterns and systematic occurrences which we have slowly come to recognize and appreciate throughout our history and at the same time if we hark back to the frontispiece of this pamphlet in which Mr. Borges made reference to; "...a silent man who conjures up a clear labyrinth", we may begin to recognize as a glimmer, the immense interconnectedness of all things in nature.

Spinoza's all-encompassing structure of nature's 'clear labyrinth' is captured and elegantly detailed in his masterwork, "The Ethics Demonstrated in Geometric Order".

He clearly understood that our bodies afford us the capacity to experience the order and arrangement of this magnificent structure which we term 'the known universe'. Our body further; serves as foundation to the mind's power to understand its source and cause and allows for that power to come to light. This budding recognition on the part of our thinking function has enabled us to bear witness to nature's enormity and grandeur and has further afforded us the capability to manipulate that knowledge to our benefit.

For Spinoza the "*union between our mind and the whole of nature*" was abundantly clear and a given as the basis for his metaphysical grasp of the human condition in all its complexity.

This connection then is the gift that we have received from god and in large measure we have used it wisely and often unknowingly to forge a multi-million year continuity of humanity.

Obviously much more remains to learn and to accomplish; we are still adolescents by universal measurements of time and as such, prone to mistakes. At the same time we need to recognize and celebrate our successes thus far and spend at least as much time on them as we do bemoaning our failings.

With this gift which we have received gratis at birth comes an enormous responsibility that each of us must accept and bear cheerfully. Pessimism is not a viable option for us. We must carry this great human endeavor forward willingly and thus show gratitude and respect to all of our forebears who bore so much hardship and for so many millennia for us.

For example, consider the multitudes of women who succumbed during childbirth or who watched helplessly as their children died from afflictions which could not be identified or treated prior to the advent of modern medicine. Think of what we owe to them before bemoaning life in today's world.

[Note - Some readers will be asking themselves at this point if we are not a bit ahead of ourselves in invoking Chapter 1 in the "Ethics" and exhibiting such unbridled enthusiasm for we humans' place in the scheme of things. Surely much work remains for us to do within the confines of the 'Fragment', why not limit ourselves to the object at hand; to decipher Spinoza's words and to illustrate their intent step by step?

At the same time, for those of us who have labored through Baruch's masterwork and who have come to accept its unique value, there is no time like the present to begin to exhibit the natural effusion which accompanies understanding, each in our own measure and to the limits of our personal capability, the workings of the immense world around us which Baruch has brought so capably to light.

He even coined a phrase for this intense appreciation; 'Amor Dei Intellectus', the intellectual love of god, which was mentioned previously.
But for now, that is enough of this. Much work remains.]

The process for isolating and identifying adequate understanding from imagination

"Up to the present, we have, first defined the end to which we desire to direct our thoughts; secondly, we have determined the mode of perception best adapted to aid us in our perfection; thirdly, we have discovered the way which our mind should take, in order to make a good beginning-namely that it should use every true idea as a standard.

Now our method must furnish us with a means of distinguishing a true idea from all other perceptions.

Let us then make a beginning with the first part of the method, to distinguish and separate the true idea from other perceptions, and to keep the mind

from confusing with true ideas those which are false, fictitious and doubtful.” [Page 17]

In our everyday lives we do not usually spend our time dissecting our ideas to categorize and group them with any sense of conforming to any standard. The things which we believe firmly, whether in our professional practice or personally held opinions, seem to come to us without any conscious effort. There appears to be no reason to question or doubt their veracity. There are some thoughts we have that we recognize as whimsical like, “I wish my friend would change overnight somehow and not act so grumpy in the office” or “I know I could serve as President of this Country.” We recognize that thoughts like these have no base in fact but of course we see them as harmless.

Spinoza now calls on us to change that habit of accepting what we believe to be true. If we wish to establish and validate the capability within our minds to hold what we believe with certainty, that is, that we know them to be true beyond any doubt, we need to recognize and hold our thought process to an established and completely verifiable standard. To establish that standard he wants us to categorize our ideas into four types: true, false, fictitious or doubtful. His contention is that if we construct our belief systems on only those ideas which are true, we will establish standards in all our endeavors whether professional or personal that will withstand any doubts about their veracity. Seems a tall order, let’s examine what Baruch has to say on this topic.

[Nota Well - The natures of reality and the truth are both the same and quite simple. Reality encapsulates our everyday experience of people and objects; truth encapsulates our minds capability to deliver a virtual duplicate of that reality. What we see each day when we open our eyes is real. We are not being deceived somehow, we are not fallen from favor and our perception is not flawed or imperfect.

There is no 'veil', no 'dharma', no 'reincarnation', no 'nirvana', no 'heaven or hell', no God or 'Allah' and certainly no truth beyond the ken of human perception which scientific objectivity claims to provide. Each of these terms exists only in the realm of imagination and superstition, no matter how powerful the belief systems that have flourished under each of them, as Spinoza understood well.]

Yes, it is true that we perceive reality daily, but our understanding of it is as yet muddled a bit. Spinoza will now help us to correct that.

"Let us then make a beginning then with the first part of the method, which is, to distinguish and separate the true idea from other perceptions, and to keep the mind from confusing with true ideas those which are false, fictitious and doubtful. I intend to dwell on this point at length, partly to keep a distinction so necessary before the reader's mind, and also because there are some who doubt of true ideas, through not having attended to the distinction between a true perception and all others."

"I shall confine myself to what concerns method- that is, to the character of fictitious, false and

doubtful perception, and the means of freeing ourselves there from. Let us then first inquire into the nature of a fictitious idea.

Every perception has for its object either a thing considered as existing, or solely the essence of a thing. Now 'fiction' is chiefly occupied with things considered as existing. I mean cases where only the existence of the object is feigned, and the thing thus feigned is understood, or assumed to be understood." Page 18

In the next few paragraphs Baruch offers his example of a fictitious idea which concerns 'Peter' and then defines the nature of a fictitious idea which is not necessary for us to quote in full here. The question for us then becomes what sense might we make of this idea comprised of fictions?

Let's assume we have a mutual friend who claims to both believe in and to have experienced an encounter with 'extra terrestrial beings'. We ask them to describe the belief and the event. They begin by telling us how their parents were the first to experience these beings and that it only occurred when the family was camping on the desert. It all began when one of the parents' friends told them about an article they had read about the presence of beings from faraway planets that from time to time, appeared to selected individuals on the desert at night.

Our friend candidly admits to never having personally met any of these beings, but shares with us that they did observe some illuminated flying objects in the night time sky on the very same desert. The objects were not planets or stars or even comets and gave off an eerie glow that was close at hand.

As is often the case in the 'Fragment' Baruch's illustration of a fictitious idea, in this case concerning our friend Peter, appears a bit sketchy.

Let us attempt then using the example above to illustrate Spinoza's distinctions on Page 19 of the 'impossible', the 'necessary' and the 'possible' in terms of an object's existence as real or fictitious.

Our first observation might be that the entire basis of our friend's belief in these beings is based entirely on hearsay. This indicates that since our friend has no firsthand experience of 'extraterrestrials' his perception falls under the first type of perception 'arising from hearsay' and can form no basis for a true idea.

As for the parents experience, we could say that their perception, whether real or imaginary, is not by necessity 'impossible', nor does its existence imply a contradiction which means it may indeed be 'probable'. No one can say with certainty that alien beings do not exist, although we may harbor serious doubts on the subject. But what is clear is that the parents' experience in no way falls under the 'necessary'; those things whose non-existence would imply a contradiction; they are constrained and rely on an external source, and yet can be said to be true.

The point here is not whether the above example precisely illustrates Spinoza's terms 'possible', 'impossible' and 'necessary'. It is rather an example of the type of analysis of our thinking process and the forming of our opinions that is required of each of us; by creating and sketching

out our own illustrations which will make Baruch's distinctions come alive for each of us personally, within our own minds. We each must create our own examples derived directly from our own unique personal experience.

This real time exercise will allow us to build a concrete conception of his definitions step by step and over time. That is the only way to build a comprehensive understanding and to reap the benefit of Spinoza's wisdom.

[Note - Page 19 Spinoza will now take a dramatic departure from the flow of the text. It appears some sort of inexplicable detour from what up to this point has been a straightforward explication of his 'method' for improving our understanding. The importance of this 'sidebar' he ends with his signature comment, which tends to show up whenever he feels the need to place particular emphasis on a given point.

"This is worthy of remark."

In this case he addresses the danger of generalizing in the search for certain knowledge. Let us examine Baruch's thoughts on generalizations.]

" I must remark, in passing , that the difference between the essence of one thing and the essence of another thing is the same as that which exists between the reality or existence of one thing and the reality or existence of another; therefore, if we wished to conceive the existence, for example, of Adam, simply by means of existence in general, it would be the same as if, in order to conceive his existence, we went back to

the nature of being, so as to define Adam as a being. Thus, the more existence is conceived generally, the more is it conceived confusedly, and the more easily can it be ascribed to a given object.

Contrariwise, the more it is conceived particularly, the more is it understood clearly, and the less likely is it to be ascribed to anything save its proper object.” Pages 19 and 20

Escaping the generalization- a lifelong challenge

In the italicized quotation above Spinoza is introducing what for many of us will be an entirely new concept; every person and object in our experience is unique unto itself.

His contention is that acting on generalizations like the concept of ‘being’ versus placing our focus on the discrete individual person or object blurs natural distinctions and prevents us from forming clear ideas.

Perhaps some examples from every day experience which we typically hear people pronounce or even those we think about in our own private thoughts may help to illustrate Baruch’s point.

We often hear comments like:

‘Those people, none of them can be trusted.’

‘Everybody knows that all politicians are liars.’

‘Men will always cheat on their wives given the opportunity.’

‘Anyone who can believe in that church definitely has a problem.’

‘Every time I see one of those cars, I know the driver is probably dangerous.’

‘Don’t hire any of them, they are lazy.’

We could go on and shape hundreds, perhaps thousands more of these type of statements. At first glance they may appear harmless, even banal, but they are not! The beliefs which lie behind each of these generalizations and countless others like them form the basis of many of our belief systems and these are far from harmless. We act on these beliefs and they greatly influence our decision making, behaviors and actions with negative consequences, like intolerance and prejudice.

What Baruch is telling us is that generalized conceptions like these are empty and that they carry no meaning, no reality.

The challenge for us consists in the fact that our brains are locked into forming hasty and erroneous characterizations of others and these influence our thinking in negative ways. That is unless and until we recognize their emptiness and fight to eradicate them with the understanding that:

-There is one person with whom we have firsthand experience who does not deserve our trust.

-An individual politician may have spoken untruthfully at an open forum which you attended,

but that does not amount to the lump sum of lawmakers being liars.

-One individual man who we have witnessed out on a date with a strange woman, cheats on his wife, from this we cannot infer that all men cheat.

-A single believer in a religion distorts that belief. He does not represent all believers in that faith.

-We observed one person who moved so slowly at a manual labor that he appeared to have a lax work ethic.

This recognition of our tendency to jump to conclusions and the behavioral change required of us to change that habit is no small task. The tendency within us to construct generalizations and to develop abstractions from them is ancient and very powerful. It will prove a lifelong challenge for each of us to overcome this proclivity and to focus on the merits of a single person, not an amorphous and imaginary group.

Spinoza even contravened his own dictum 'to not expose the mistakes of others', in the case of one generalization which proved too much even for his vaunted patience. In a rare vent of anger he spoke out against the view which was just coming to light in the new science of his time.

This theory, still prevalent today, holds that human beings are essentially the same as any other animal and should be treated scientifically as virtually equivalent. This strange assertion based on an ill-formed generalization was too much for him. He found it "abhorrent", and so should we.

Page 20 - Baruch will now continue to breakdown the constituent parts of similar types of fictitious ideas. In this analysis he juxtaposes fictitious ideas with clear ones in order to reflect back from the false to what are true ideas, quite a unique method for displaying the truth.

Since the analysis is similar to the example above each of us should be able to recognize the distinctions among them and to take care in forming our own ideas.

Before we move on to Baruch's inquiry into the power of the mind to form true ideas there remains for us to examine a number of statements he makes beginning with the text in the middle of page 20.

"We can hypothesize so long as we see no impossibility. This I say, I can feign so long I do not perceive any impossibility or necessity; if I truly understood either one or the other [to be the case] I should not be able to feign."

Our inability to deceive ourselves about the nature of an idea that we understand to be true is such an integral component of the nature of a true idea that it would be wise for us to pause here and to look more closely at this facet of the truth.

The truth requires no sign, it is self evident

A young boy grows up in a populated area in the city. Every few blocks of homes seem to be occupied by a different cultural group. At home he is constantly reminded of the difference between his status and the others and it becomes instilled in him that many of these ethnic groups are inferior to his own. He receives apparent confirmation of this among his neighbor children

and schoolmates. Fist fights break out almost every day among the different groups and demeaning racial slurs and insults are traded and appear in written form on walls and sidewalks everywhere. These experiences coalesce to form in his thinking the fact that his parents are correct.

He heads off to university with a firm belief that something is definitely flawed in the makeup of some ethnicities. But something happens to him as he progresses through his college education. As he gains exposure to the 'history of ideas' his thinking matures and becomes more attuned to the realities of the world. He begins to see clearly that there is no inherent flaw in peoples' character and that in fact we are all pretty much the same human beings from birth onward, and that prejudice arises from underexposure to and ignorance of, other cultures.

Now as a mature adult he recognizes that all people are created equal and that each one has the same rights that he has; to live their lives in peace and to practice the belief system of their choosing. He can barely remember a time when this idea was not perfectly clear to him. He now sees that this particular truth is self evident and was true even before he came to recognize it. He will never return to his boyish thinking again. This is what Baruch intends with his assertion that the 'truth' is self-evident.

Let us now return to our look into Spinoza's breakdown of the nature of false, fictitious and doubtful perceptions.

It will be important for all of us to bear in mind as we study Baruch's depictions of the various

fictitious ideas and how to avoid them, that this exercise will have a positive impact in our daily lives.

When we take the time to reflect on the things that we believe to be true which form the basis of our belief systems, we can apply this methodology to isolate ill formed ideas or fragmented ones and to simply discard them. This is no small help in avoiding mistaken notions that hinder our adequate understanding and negatively impact our behaviors and dealings with other people. It will further amplify our sense of well being by understanding those things that we understand clearly from thoughts that waste our precious time in life.

“Let us shortly come to our conclusion, and again repeat that we need have no need to fear of confusing with true ideas that which is only a fiction. As for the first sort of fiction, when a thing is clearly conceived, the existence of that thing is in itself an eternal truth; fiction can have no part in it. If the existence of the thing conceived be not an eternal truth, we have only to be careful that such existence be compared to the thing’s essence, and to consider the order of nature.”
[Page 24]

In this paragraph Baruch’s usage of the concepts, ‘eternal truth’ and, ‘the order of nature’ may need some updating into a more familiar and accessible terminology for today’s readers.

If we consider the universal laws that have been ‘discovered’ by recent scientists; like the laws of Thermodynamics, Gravity, the predictable pathways of planetary motion, etc. these concepts

bear a close approximation to what Baruch means by 'eternal truth' and 'the order of nature'. Certain aspects in human behaviors fall under these categories as well, hence the title, "Ethics". Because Spinoza is personalizing an individual's experience in the quotation above, as we contemplate our own thinking process for the purpose of selecting only adequate ideas, we need to find examples of nature's laws that are within the bounds of our daily lives and our personal experience.

Remember the young girl whose native curiosity led her to discover the process that allows for an apple blossom to become a piece of fruit. She back tracked from the blossom to the bees that pollinated each tree and retraced the bee's activity, finally recognizing that the insect's activity and the fruit that was the eventual outcome of a lengthy process all had as their proximate cause the sun.

The entire process operates under the aegis of the immutable and fixed causes of the universe which Baruch refers to again and again.

This growing cycle serves as an example of 'the order of nature' in operation and the 'eternal truth' inherent and self evident in the growing cycle of an apple tree. Finally it is her own mind that provides the direct connection and conduit to her recognition of the truth or reality involved in this process.

Because this represents such a significant point in our effort to understand Baruch's 'Fragment' let us try one more example of 'eternal truth' and 'the

order of nature', including the mind's role in serving to illuminate the marvel in our lives.

We shall turn here to observe one element in the cycle of human life itself, the interrelated moments of conception and birth.

Think about the joy those of us have felt who have been privileged to witness the actual moment of a newborn's entry into the world, whether as a parent or close family relative. There are really no words that would prove adequate to describe the moment of birth and our sense of joy and wonder at what can only be described as a miracle. This little creature who only seconds beforehand was immersed and breathing within a viscous liquid environment within the confines of its mother's body suddenly emerges to gasp its very first breath in our world. Our sense of awe at this emergence into our presence can be quite overwhelming.

Afterwards as we sit and reflect on what caused this miracle of birth to happen, and we turn our mind's eye to the moment when fertilization occurs. We recognize clearly that here is where the real mystery lies.

No one of us understands the fundamental nature of the cause that makes that moment happen, although in the simplest sense we can posit the parents as the proximate cause. The force that enables the commingling of the egg and sperm to perpetuate life is and may always remain a process that our understanding can never penetrate. It is truly far beyond our ken, even though our mind can glimpse intuitively the

enormity of the event, and understand that some type of enormous causality lies behind it.

Both of these naturally occurring events constitute an example of Baruch's 'eternal truths'.

Everything that comes to be, in any form: plant, animal or planet emanates from a function which is universal and whose cause remains unknowable, we term it 'birth'. And yet each of these events irrevocably conforms to the fixed laws of nature, which we can, with prodigious effort, recognize and comprehend in an intuitional understanding, if not as something we can easily put into words.

This birthing process manifests itself throughout the whole of nature and constitutes the presence of the essence, which Spinoza wishes us to focus our thoughts upon. It is the only subject matter we require to attempt to understand reality and how to use this knowledge to direct '*all of our actions*'. This then will remain our enduring challenge, throughout our lives.

The Reality of Truth

"As regards that which constitutes the reality of truth, it is certain that a true idea is distinguished from a false one, not so much for its extrinsic object as by its intrinsic nature. If an architect conceives a building properly constructed, though such a building may never have existed, and may never exist, nevertheless the idea is true; and the idea remains the same, whether it be put into execution or not." [Top page 26]

In this illustration of the building we have one of the only easily accessible and concrete examples

which Baruch displays on the virtual existence and inherent power of human ideas.

[Note - Once each of us reaches Part 1 in the 'Ethics' Spinoza will introduce the philosophical/technical terms for the two concepts here named: 'fundamental nature of the unknowable cause', of birth and the growth cycle and 'naturally occurring events'.

In Baruch's philosophy the concepts will become 'Substance' or 'cause of itself' in the case of substance and for 'naturally occurring events' it will be 'modification of substance'.

Substance is infinite and self caused, while a modification is conceived and caused through substance which renders it an interconnected substrata. These illustrations and their connection with Spinoza's definitions of substance and modification will not simply jump off the page to the reader. Both concepts will require an extensive amount of study and deep reflection on our parts to become clear.

The power of the mind to form true ideas

"It only remains for us to inquire by what power our mind can form true ideas, and how far such power extends. If it be the nature of a thinking being, as seems, prima facie, [evident without proof or reasoning], to be the case, to form true or adequate thoughts, it is plain that inadequate ideas arise in us only because we are parts of a thinking being, whose thoughts-some in their entirety, others in fragments only-constitute our minds." [Page 27]

Before attempting to discern precisely what is the power of the mind to form true ideas we must pause and examine a strange two word insertion in this paragraph; *Prima Facie*. These two words, whose secondary dictionary meaning comes to us from Middle English although its source is Latin, bear extraordinary weight in conveying the most accurate and pure definition of what Baruch termed a part of the nature of the 'truth' or 'reality'.

This secondary meaning of *prima facie* is as follows: 'Evident without proof or reasoning, obvious'. As strange as it may sound to make reference to a common dictionary in a work of this nature, nevertheless here we are.

Obvious and self-evident are interchangeable terms for Baruch. And, again, they do not bear any resemblance to our current common usage of the terms. Today we might say, 'Why can't you see that, it's so obvious to me?' But Spinoza's use of obvious and self-evident is more akin to hindsight. Here we might say, 'I don't know why I never understood that before, it was always so obvious'. That is what Baruch intends by self-evident.

We recall Spinoza's claim that the 'truth' requires no sign. But nowhere does he make this most stupefying claim so simple and so clear; that to participate in metaphysical reality requires no real conscious effort, at least not a mental or thought induced one. Humans experience the truth of reality as a natural function apparently given at birth in our ability to form adequate ideas in our minds, based solely on experience.

Once we have come to recognize this innate ability in our mind and how to clarify its power and

reach; this activity must become our primary task in life. This responsibility goes hand in hand with the recognition of the enormous responsibility that attends grasping his philosophy.

[Note1 - From the very first page in our conversation about Spinoza's 'Fragment' emphasis has been placed on our rejection of the belief that human perception is somehow inherently flawed. As noted, previously and often, this strange belief system is pervasive and has contaminated virtually all of our scientific and religious systems. It has reached the point where it is doubtful if more than just a handful of us balk at the acceptance of our 'fallen' natural state, and the requirement for any of our assertions to be supported by some type of proof.

But Baruch clearly and resoundingly rejects this assertion. He recognized that human nature, while clearly developmental and malleable, has almost unlimited potential to understand and manipulate our world through its own self contained, innate power.

This potential is housed organically in each of us within the bounds of the human thinking function or mind.]

Is our perception of time purely a subjective, synthetic manmade device?

[Note 2- One area where there appears to be unanimous agreement on human frailty is in our perception and experience of time. Theories abound as to the 'arbitrary' delineation of the earthly calendar and the 'illusory nature' of our experience of the passing of time. Some theorists go so far as to posit time as a purely human

contrivance which has no relevance and certainly no connection to the atomic clock which supposedly marks the objective pace of time as experienced by the universe itself. At best our experience of time is considered by many to be purely subjective in nature.

Let us take a closer look at our human experience of the passing of time and how it came to be recognized and formalized into its current state. Hopefully this may serve as an example of what Spinoza meant by concepts that originated in negative form and over time came to be accepted as irrevocably true.

Time as an organic measurement of duration on planet earth

All of the advances made by our human species come about through the experience and observation of natural phenomena coupled with human reflexive knowledge and the intuitive understanding that results often during a moment of Eureka!

Thus patient and extremely capable observers of the motion of our planet as it passes through the solar system began to notice certain consistencies. These observers, who lived during different time periods and in a wide disparity of geographical locations, recorded their observations which eventually became the backbone of a systematic measurement of changes that occurred on a regulated basis. Movements as in the four seasons, the planets in motion in relation to the earth, the revolving nature of the 'wheel of stars' that make up the 'milky way', the cycles of the moon in its orbit

around the earth and numerous other re-occurring phenomena, informed these observations until they coalesced into an established and coherent theory of the passage of time.

Even though the various cultures disbursed around the globe recognized and codified these predictable regularities using differing forms of notation, we now recognize that almost everywhere on the planet cultures recognized and set the patterns of their lives on some sort of calendar.

Today that calendar has become quite a sophisticated device which not only takes into account the revolution of the earth around the sun but also has calculated into its measurement the speed of the rotation of the planet itself.

What has resulted is an accurate and real time measurement of the actual passage of time.

Simply stated; the earth is roughly 24,000 miles in circumference. The relative speed of its rotation at the surface is 1,000 miles an hour.

This proportional relationship nets us an accurate number of delineated zones, which when taken together form the basis for the 24 hours that makes up the passage of one day. It also mirrors precisely our experience of the duration of a day.

This is an extremely accurate representation of the movement of our planet and its fixed relation to all the other planets, the sun and the extended solar system.

This also takes into account the earth's rotation around its own axis.

It also provides an accurate method for predicting the beginning and end points for each season and year, the phases of the moon and the tides, and marks the extent and passage of time for human life.

It is not an arbitrary arrangement. It is not out of sync with some imaginary cosmic time piece.

It is an organic measurement that is tied into the actual motion of the planets and stars. And the human mind is the active and engaged element in this recognition and measurement of the passage of time and its uniform application worldwide today. End note]

These two sidebars should not be seen as a distraction from our look into Baruch's italicized comment on the top of our page 21 which begins, *'It only remains for us to inquire by what power our mind can form true ideas...'* They are rather both illustrations of that very power of the mind.

Conclusion from the two notes above

This innate presence of the mind in each and every human body and its 'prima facie' or self-evident power to form adequate ideas will form the foundation for the entire structure and composition of Baruch's metaphysical assertions. Without such a recognizable and self-evident mechanism there would be no epistemological framework for his argument; that individuals have access to the truth of reality, or in fact for any coherent concept of human knowledge whatsoever.

The two sections above; the first a simple dictionary's take on prima facie affords us the

most direct unqualified definition of the primal aspect of truth. In order for anything whatsoever to be said to be true it must contain these three elements: it must be 'evident' it must 'require no proof or reasoning' and it must be 'obvious'.

This is what nature provides us. It is that which is offered to us gratis without any effort on our part. Our role will be to grapple with the significance of the mind's presence within us, it is in point of fact the 'holy grail' so widely sought through all the ages but never found.

Now and thanks to Baruch's insight, it is within our reach. Are we up to the challenge? We shall see.

The second section provides a simple and yet clear demonstration of how we have acted on these three aspects of the truth to form an adequate understanding of 'time' that is both 'real time' and 'true'.

In this case we can further ascertain how through the use of 'reflective knowledge' (absorbing our observation of natural phenomena over time) and 'intuitional understanding' (allowing the mind to concentrate on these observations and to deduce relevant and adequately understood truths concerning their proximate causality) we arrived at a grasp of one aspect of nature's eternal laws. That the human experience of time is an organic function of the universe and nothing fanciful or arbitrary. End note]

After this lengthy yet vital note section let us now return to Baruch's quote at the top of our page 20 and examine closely this phrase '*by what power our mind can form true ideas*'.

The word power should immediately jump off the page because it refers directly to a concept that does not appear anywhere in the annals of Western thinking on cognitive theory. All theories of knowledge across the board whatever their author or source, unanimously reject any possibility whatsoever that the human mind contains its own power and innate connection to and control over all of the elements in its experiential world. For theorists and practitioners alike, the world impinges impressions upon us and controls our behaviors.

And yet Spinoza maintains steadfastly that our minds innately contain this capability and further employ this resource to actively and automatically engage with and make sense of the external world.

This revelation captures the core element in Spinoza's entire epistemology which insists that the location and wellspring of human knowledge resides within the human mind.

We have now reached the ultimate crux of the matter and the focal point of our discussion of the human mind. After the entire bulk of our discussion so far one question remains, "What exactly is the power of the mind and wherein lies its source?"

To demonstrate this phenomena clearly Spinoza employs an example of the existence together with the idea of a particular person; Peter [Page 26]

As each of us studies this section no matter how we individually frame for ourselves what Baruch

intends for us by offering this example of the 'idea' of Peter and the person/subject of Peter as one and the same thing, here is one way to break it down.

Visualize the process that occurs over time as we get to know someone, in this case Peter. From our first meeting and exposure to him until ultimately we develop a strong feeling that in some measure we have come to 'know' this person in depth. Try to picture from our initial contact with 'Peter' our minds forming a kind of series of aligned pixels, segments of what will later become a completed image like those displayed on a screen. Once fully fleshed out these pixels coalesce into a completed image of the person Peter, which forms an idea in our mind that conforms nearly precisely to the man himself, in flesh and blood.

Once these accumulated pixels have coalesced to form a completed image of the person, this indicates that our mind has framed an accurate idea of Peter that will be kept stored and which is now transferable, in words, to another acquaintance of ours. This new person can themselves experience the same understanding that we did and arrive at a similar conclusion; namely that in a significant way they too now 'know' Peter. This fore knowledge of Peter will become confirmed for them when they actually physically meet and experience Peter and his personality real time for themselves.

Bear in mind this is not our brain accomplishing this task. Our brain may indeed be a part of the storage component in the process but in no way is it an active participant in the formation of the

adequate idea. Only the human mind can accomplish this along with our active participation, something Baruch terms '*an item considered by the understanding*'.

Now consider all of the ideas that we hold on all of the subjects within our ken: science, religion, our bodies, politics, nutrition; virtually anything and everything we can think about. These ideas constitute the process and the power of the mind on display.

That does not mean that we can automatically appreciate and understand the details of this activity consciously. It will take patience and years of effort on our parts to first discover and recognize the existence of these 'ideas' and then to consciously clarify and sort them.

Moving along then, Baruch has spent quite a bit of time expanding on what constitutes clear and therefore true ideas. Now he will takes us to the converse, muddled or confused notions that firmly present themselves to us as true ideas. These stubborn creations of our own making which become concretized in the understanding become our most extreme barrier to adequate understanding.

For this we need to look closely at some of Spinoza's comments on the power of the imagination and its ability to produce adequate, yet false ideas and to offer an example of our own to attempt to display the degree of difficulty required to avoid these 'false perceptions' . For this example we will examine a major confusion currently and consistently running

rampant in most, if not all of scientific research and clinical trials and studies.

[This hopefully will be the only time that we will expose and dwell on the ‘mistakes of others’, a process which Baruch abhorred.]

“Another point to be considered , which gives rise to complete deception-namely, that certain things presented to the imagination also exist in the understanding-in other words, are conceived clearly and distinctly. Hence, so long as we do not separate that which is distinct from that which is confused, certainty, or the true idea, becomes mixed with indistinct ideas.” Page 28 top

To highlight this confusion between clarity in the imagination and the selfsame thing in the understanding consider the following example which will attempt to bring to light our current malaise of confusing cause and effect.

Make a conscious effort to picture yourself standing atop the tallest structure in the middle of a large city just before dawn. This position affords the viewer a 360 degree view of the roads and avenues which lead to and from the downtown. The city is ‘awakening’ and there is a steady flow of traffic and lights everywhere on the roadways. There are white headlights and red taillights, flashing orange beacons and green, orange and red traffic lights.

Clear patterns are evident marking those vehicles making their way into and distinguishing them from those vehicles departing the city. Some are stopped and some are moving.

Something begins to seem clear to you, namely that the stop and go lights and the blinking orange beacons are somehow responsible for the complete flow of the traffic. The lights appear to be the one constant which is dictating all of the movement. The vehicles only move when permitted by the lighting scheme to do so. You draw the conclusion that somehow, you are not completely certain how just yet, but surely somehow the lighting system is the cause of all of the contiguous motion which you are observing.

After all what other visible determinant could there be to account for the constant and smoothly choreographed movement?

With a broader perspective on the scene and some clear thinking applied to the possible causes of the traffic it becomes clear that a traffic control system, no matter how elaborate and effective it may be, can never be the cause behind each individual person's decision to drive. The lighting system clearly plays a role in the traffic flow, but the driver consciously directs the cars movement and destination.

The mistaken notion in play here is leaving out of the equation each individual driver and whatever has motivated them to become part of the early morning rush into the city from the conclusion of the cause.

Each driver has their own unique reason and cause for them to drive either to or from the city at this hour. For some it is for work, for others for travel. In other words there are an almost infinite and unique number of possibilities as to why each driver is engaged in the flow. None of their

reasons are visible and therefore it is much easier and somewhat a natural tendency for us to join them all together and to act as if there is one cause for the activity, in this case the lights.

The mistake here is to view an effect, the coincidence that all of the vehicles are traveling in patterns controlled by the alternately changing lighting system, and from this observation drawing the conclusion that the lights are the cause of the activity.

This is the confusion that currently informs most of current scientific enquiry and is prevalent in neurology and particularly evident in the behavior based orientation in neurobiology, in which synapses in the brain visible through the use of electronic imaging are confused for the causes of whatever human action is being studied.

Spinoza singled out our habit of confusing cause and effect as perhaps the major roadblock to adequately understanding 'actual causes'.

At present, empirical science typically observes and studies only those things which are visible and thus measureable. Only these types of activity count as real. Compared to what Baruch opens up for us with the intuitive nature of understanding, empiricism offers quite a dim view of the mystery of life and human knowledge. Hopefully this outdated and erroneous world view can be corrected over time.

Bear in mind that this negative representation of current scientific methodology is not, nor is it intended to be, a blanket condemnation of all things scientific. There are countless wonders

which have come to light under the aegis of the empirical method. Having personally been the recipient of the newest applications in medical science and treatment has given insight and a true appreciation of what empirics has accomplished for us.

But Baruch is now affording us an opportunity to greatly expand our notion and understanding of reality and the truth. His seminal thinking and discovery of the limitless potential resident in the human mind when it becomes focused on the true natural order and progression of things in our experience will allow us to shape a present and future that will prove even more conducive to the continuation of our noble experiment as part of all that is possible in nature's infinity.

It will require a monumental effort to convince ourselves to alter our world view to accommodate his recognition, but will prove more than worth the effort.

Many of us might now raise a new question; what exactly would be different if Spinoza's model of science were applied to research? And how would his application of cause and effect appear if it were adequately understood?

Two recent developments; one in astrophysics, the other in human biology may point the way.

Astrophysicists have become intrigued with the notion of 'dark matter', the invisible force which makes up at least 75% of the bulk of all the mass which constitutes the entire fabric of the universe. This discovery is moving them to recognize that not only those things which are 'visible and can

be measured' are viable objects in scientific enquiry.

Now it is possible and becoming acceptable to posit potentially parallel universes through the observation of the 'background noise' which accompanies the dark matter and permeates the universe but has no discernible or measurable source.

Dark matter remains unseen and not knowable except through the application of Baruch's method for understanding anything whatsoever; which is that 'reflexive knowledge' garnered directly through nature, not just the visible world, is the actual bedrock and foundation for the mind's intended function of 'intuitional understanding'.

The other development which is sparking interest is in biological circles. That is the recognition of the micro-biome, the tiniest micro-organism ever discovered. Its numbers far exceed those of cells and DNA molecules and the control they exhibit over bodily functions is stupendous. The micro-biome operates at the bacterial cellular level and its role is to transmit triggering instructions between and among the cells.

The upshot from this new discovery has been the startling recognition that each human is absolutely unique in biological make up viewed through this frame. The implications for the pharmaceutical industry will become enormous as scientists will now attempt to instruct the body to effectively heal itself through its own power. Using the same signaling methodology they will apply medicines

at micro-dosages which will affect only the diseased cellular structure.

The most significant element in all of this, for our purposes, is science's recognition that the bacterial structure in each of us is absolutely unique. No two of us are the same. This supports Baruch's contention that uniqueness amid vast interconnectedness make up the two salient features of all objects in nature. This is not a paradox; this is reality.

These two examples from our new world of science adhere to Baruch's guideline for clear and adequate search for causes. In both cases we are beginning to move from abstractions derived from generalizations which can only be formed in the imagination and are thus disconnected from the actual order of nature, to identifying the proper order of the visible world and its irrevocable interconnectedness to the unseen world.

In the search for actual causes in the structural workings of the universe the two worlds must merge to form a complete picture for our minds to contemplate.

In astrophysics the abstraction has been the misapplied theory of the uniform and predictable development of the universe beginning with the 'big bang'. Coupled with this is the misunderstood notion that somehow human beings are in a position to observe the beginning of time itself.

With the micro-biome we are moving away from the mistaken notion that all human beings are somehow equivalent biologically and can be treated with one and the same set of medicines

across the board. Uniqueness not sameness is our common feature.

These two developments are extremely worthy of note.

Spinoza's words as usual offer some clarity on the generalizations which we have a tendency to create in our scientific applications; like 'man is an animal and thus must be comparable to all other animals in most aspects'. This section will end with his words on the subject of generalizations and forming abstractions from them.

"As far as the knowledge of the origin of nature is concerned, there is no danger of our confounding it with abstractions. For when a thing is considered in the abstract, as are all universal notions, the said universal notions are always more extensive in the mind than the number of individuals forming their contents really existing in nature." [Bottom page 28, top page 29]

A reminder- Spinoza, in his wisdom, found a unique way to dissect as discrete units items which we are unaccustomed to seeing treated this way: understanding, imagination, mind, brain, body, memory, forgetfulness and sensation and others. When we reach the 'Ethics' he will give a definitive breakdown of these concepts and clearly delineate each one's place of intersection with all of the others plus their subtle interactions and overlapping.

This achievement is unique in the history of human thinking and needs to be approached as very unfamiliar and very new territory for us. This is worth mentioning again at this juncture.

Over the next few pages Baruch shifts his attention to the doubtful idea, its nature and the required remedies to overcome doubt. Upon careful consideration it appeared evident that the capable reader will have little problem discerning his meaning on doubt, therefore no further clarification will be necessary on this subject. Baruch's intent and meaning are abundantly clear. Let us therefore move on to consider the status of memory.

"The point most worthy of attention is, that memory is strengthened with and without the aid of the understanding. For the more intelligible a thing is the more easily is it remembered, and the less intelligible it is, the more easily do we forget it... If we read, for instance, a single romantic comedy, we shall remember it very well so long as we do not read many others of the same kind, for it will reign alone in the memory. If, however, we read several others of the same kind, we shall think of them altogether, and easily confuse one with another." [Page 31]

Here he is directing our function of memory towards identifying those objects which are unique in themselves and therefore part of the order of nature. He warns us not to confuse these objects with items that are muddled and indistinct and therefore which are products of the imagination.

Baruch then concludes with the definition of memory and forgetfulness and insists on their distinct separation from the understanding.

“The imagination is only affected by particular physical objects. As, then, the memory is strengthened both with and without the aid of the understanding, we may conclude that it is different from the understanding, and that in the latter considered in itself there is neither memory nor forgetfulness.

What then is memory? It is nothing else than the actual sensation of impressions on the brain, accompanied with the thought of a definite duration.” [Page 31]

That reverie commonly referred to as ‘daydreaming’ will serve as a good example of what Baruch means in the last sentence above. Most would agree that a daydream is a series of either associated or unassociated thoughts triggered by a certain remembrance and lasting for a brief period of time. We may see an object or experience a sound or a scent that triggers fond memories of events from our past.

For a few moments our thoughts are taken over by the sweetness of the reverie and then just as quickly we seem to wake up and come back to ourselves. These then are’ *sensations of impressions on the brain, accompanied with the thought of a definite duration*’, precisely what Spinoza just stated though expressed in common language. There is nothing more to add to this segment and we need to continue on.

We have reached the point where only a dozen more pages remain in the treatise known as “Emendatione Intellectus” or “On the Improvement of the Understanding”, which has come to be known as the ‘Fragment’, because it ends abruptly and with no formal conclusion.

Let us try to use what little time we have left together as wisely as possible.

Baruch ends this segment of method with a summary of the topics which he has covered:

“Thus, then, we have distinguished between a true idea and other perceptions, and shown that ideas fictitious, false, and the rest, originate in the imagination—that is, in certain sensations fortuitous (so to speak) and disconnected, arising not from the power of the mind, but from external causes, according as the body, sleeping or waking, receives various motions.” [Page 32]

He then includes the addition of a most curious remark which the reader may interpret howsoever he or she might choose:

“But one may take any view one likes of the imagination so long as one acknowledges that it is different from the understanding, and that the soul is passive with regard to it.”

And one more curious note:

“As regards a true idea, we have shown that it is simple or compounded of simple ideas; that it shows how and why something is or has been made; and that its subjective effects in the soul correspond to the actual reality of its object.[The thing made] This conclusion is identical with the saying of the ancients, that true science proceeds from cause to effect; though the ancients, so far as I know, never formed the conception put forward here that the soul acts according to fixed

laws, and is as it were an immaterial automaton.”
[Page 32]

Before moving to the second part of method which we will explore briefly Baruch addresses the status of words. Words have wreaked havoc throughout the annals of the history of communication from the written words of the philosophers all the way through human personal communication. Confusion as to the limits in words' ability to communicate meaning has even brought a number of capable men to their knees.

One notable example involved a famous British mathematician and a German philologist, scholar and primary school instructor. They set out both alone and together to ferret out the core element of 'meaning', which they assumed and fervently believed could be drawn out of some sort of atomic principle contained in the root or core of words.

They produced voluminous works and the German created a famous 'Tractatus' which he eventually abandoned because no sense could be drawn from studying it.

The British gentleman was forced to give up on philosophy itself, declaring it to be 'useless' and returned to his mathematical musings. The German came to his senses, in some measure, and wrote a few modest pamphlets on the subject of 'common language', referred to as the Blue and the Brown books respectively.

Spinoza's take on the ability of words to carry or convey meaning clarifies the issue once and for all.

“There is no doubt that words may, equally with the imagination, be the cause of many and great errors, unless we keep strictly on our guard. Words are formed according to popular fancy and intelligence, and are, therefore, signs of things existing in the imagination, not as existing in the understanding. Many things we affirm and deny, because the nature of words allows us to do so, though the nature of things does not. While we remain unaware of this fact, we may easily mistake falsehood for truth.” [Page 33]

Simply stated, there is one possible residence for meaning and that is within the human mind. Consider a book sitting untouched on a shelf. In itself it contains nothing more than paper and typed symbols. Nothing about it is alive until touched by human hands and experienced by the individual human mind, the reader’s mind.

Thus the power of words seen clearly is only to serve as conveyors of meaning. Until absorbed and actively ‘considered’ by the mind they remain empty symbols.

The ‘Fragment’ ends with what Spinoza terms the second part of method; how we may acquire clear and distinct ideas and then, how they may become adequate or true by applying to them accurate definitions, both for internal comprehension and for external communication with others.

Then will follow his depiction of the proper focus for our contemplation which holds the key to recognizing the appropriate subject matter for us;

those things in our experience which have the capacity to obtain to the true: objects in nature that contain within them their own causality or which can be identified through their proximate cause.

In common terms they are the ordinary objects [so called] that we meet in our everyday experience. Yet they hold much more significance for us than that, because they also exist as ideas in the mind.

Next will be the method for forming accurate definitions. This will assure us that we have captured directly the fixed nature of reality or god which is the set of infinite possibilities. Creating accurate definitions makes the interconnected nature of objects in nature accessible to us through our capacity to understand and to accurately capture, in words, their precise meaning

Finally Baruch will touch on his eight properties of the understanding. This last segment while easy enough to read is frighteningly difficult to understand clearly. It will require much effort and mental exertion on our part to see clearly his intent and meaning behind his words.

Let us then commence our look at the ending segments of the 'Fragment'.

"The object aimed at is the acquisition of clear and distinct ideas, such as are produced by the pure intellect, and not by chance physical motions. In order that all ideas may be reduced to unity, we shall endeavor so to associate and arrange them that our mind may, as far as

possible, reflect subjectively the reality of nature, both as a whole and as parts.

“It is necessary for our purpose that everything should be conceived, either through its essence, or through its proximate cause. If the thing be self-existent, or, as is commonly said, the cause of itself, it must be understood through its essence only; if it be not self-existent, but requires a cause for its existence, it must be understood through its proximate cause.” [Page 34]

If we return for a moment to our example of the young girl and her observation of the growth cycle involved in the production of the fruit we call ‘apple’; the apple is not self caused but must be understood through its proximate cause, the ‘sun’ which can be considered in some measure to be a part of the self-existent elements that make up the fabric and processes of the universe.

Baruch continues:

“For, in reality, the knowledge of an effect [apple] is nothing more than the acquisition of more perfect knowledge of its cause [the sun]. Therefore, we may never, while we are concerned with inquiries into actual things, draw any conclusions from abstractions; we shall be extremely careful not to confound that which is only in the understanding [the adequate idea of the apple] with that which is in the thing itself [the apple in nature].

For us the adequate idea of the apple and the physical object apple are co-equivalent. On its own each represents one of the two attributes of god in which we participate actively; thought and extension. Gods’ attributes are endless and

infinite, this concept we can intuit somewhat clearly but will never fully comprehend consciously. These are the only two of the infinite attributes which a human being does experience, but they will prove to be more than enough since each is infinite in its own right. Each contains a limitless wellspring of data and inspiration for us. Even beyond that, it is extremely doubtful that we will ever reach a total or complete understanding of all of the aspects contained in either one.

[Continuing from the quotation above]

The best basis for drawing a conclusion will be either some particular affirmative essence, or a true and legitimate definition. For the understanding cannot descend from universal axioms by themselves to particular things, since axioms are of infinite extent, and do not determine the understanding to contemplate one particular thing more than another." [Same page]

For example the axiom; 'all human life begins at birth' while infinitely true as an axiom, cannot lead us to understand one individual's birth through grasping an understanding of its proximate cause. This axiom is too broad and an abstraction, we need to drill down to one event, in this case the parents' conceiving a child. The parents' conjugation will serve, for our purpose, as an example of the proximate cause of one birth, even though, strictly speaking, the parents have no capability of being the actual cause of the process of birth. For the ultimate self existent cause of procreation we needs must reach all the way to nature's source, not something quite tenable for us as yet. In time it may come to us.

“Thus the true method of discovery is to form thoughts from some given definition. This process will be more fruitful and easy in proportion as the thing given is better defined. Wherefore, the cardinal point of all this second part of method consists in the knowledge of the conditions of good definition, and the means of finding them.

“A definition, if it is to be called perfect, must explain the inmost essence of a thing, and must take care not to substitute for this any of its properties.

“In order to illustrate my meaning I will choose the definition of a circle. If a circle be defined as a figure, such that all straight lines drawn from the center to the circumference are equal, everyone can see that such a circle does not in the least explain the essence of a circle, but solely one of its properties. This is of no importance in the case of figures and other abstractions. It is of great importance in the case of physical beings and realities.

“The following rule for created things should be observed in definition:-

If the thing in question be created, the definition must comprehend the proximate cause. A circle should, according to this rule, be defined as follows: the figured described by any line whereof one end is fixed and the other free.” [Page 35]

Notice that this description of a circle implies motion around an axis and automatically includes by deduction, each and all of its properties: such as a circle shall include a radius and a circumference, shall contain 360 degrees, etc. This definition also subscribes to Baruch's dictum

for 'good definitions' in that it includes the proximate cause of the circle as just explained.

"The rules for the definition of an uncreated thing, [meaning self-existent or cause of itself] are as follows:-

"The exclusion of all idea of cause-that is, the thing must not need explanation by anything outside itself."

[Note-We typically do not ask the question, 'What is the cause of gravity?' There is no need to ask that because its nature in itself requires no explanation for its existence. It simply is a naturally occurring force which affects virtually everything in nature.]

When the definition of the thing has been given there must be no room for doubt as to whether the thing exists or not.

It must contain, as far as the mind is concerned, no substantives which could be put into an adjectival form; in other words, the object must not be explained through abstractions.

[Our definition of gravity conforms to this requirement.]

Lastly, though this is not absolutely necessary, it should be possible to deduce from the definition all the properties of the thing defined." [Page 36]

[That gravity affects all planetary motion down to and including all life on the earth can be thusly deduced.]

Spinoza will now explain the order of our perceptions and their relationship with the cause of all ideas.

“Knowledge of particular things should be sought for as diligently as possible. As regards the order of our perceptions, and the manner in which they should be arranged and united, it is necessary that we should inquire whether there be any being that is the cause of all things, so that its essence, represented in thought, may be the cause of all our ideas, and then our mind will to the utmost possible extent reflect nature. For it will possess, subjectively, nature’s essence order and union.”

[Page 36]

Take whatever time is required to contemplate the above quotation. Its meaning will become clear eventually.

Let us look carefully [as always] into Baruch’s final comment on material objects within our experience and ken.

“Thus we can see that it is before all things necessary for us to deduce all our ideas from physical things-that is, from real entities, proceeding, as far as may be, according to the series of causes, from one reality to another real entity, never passing to universals and abstractions, either for the purpose of deducing some real entity from them, or deducing them from some real entity. Either of these processes interrupts the true progress of the understanding. But it must be observed that, by the series of causes and real entities, I do not here mean the series of particular and mutable things, but only the series of fixed and eternal things.” [Page 37]

The difference Baruch intends here is in the same case as the relationship between the 'apple' and the 'sun'. The first being something mutable, while the second is fixed and eternal, as far as we are concerned.

We shall close our discussion of the 'Fragment', with Spinoza's final and most imposing depiction of the power, resident and innate within the human mind. There will be little or no commentary on this end piece. It must be read and contemplated by each one of us, alone, with only our own faculty as our guide.

"If, as stated in the first part, it belongs to the nature of thought to form true ideas, we must here inquire what is meant by the faculties and power of the understanding. The chief part of our method is to understand as well as possible the powers of the intellect, and its nature. Let us, then, enumerate here the properties of the understanding, let us examine them, and begin by discussing the instruments for research which we find innate in us." [Page 39]

"The properties of the understanding which I have chiefly remarked, and which I clearly understand, are the following:-

It involves certainty - in other words it knows that a thing exists in reality as it is reflected subjectively. [In the mind]

That it perceives certain things or forms some ideas absolutely some ideas from others. Thus it forms the idea of quantity absolutely, without reference to any other thoughts; but ideas of

motion it only forms after taking into consideration the idea of quantity.

Those ideas which the understanding forms absolutely express infinity; determinate ideas are formed from others. Thus in the idea of quantity, perceived by means of a cause, the quantity is determined, as when a body is perceived to be formed by the motion of a plane, a plane by the motion of a line,, or, again, a line by the motion of a point. All these are perceptions which do not serve towards understanding quantity, but only towards determining it.

We can even prolong the motion so as to form an infinite line, which we certainly could not do unless we had an idea of infinite quantity.

The understanding forms positive ideas before forming negative ideas.

It perceives thing not so much under the conditions of duration as under a certain form of eternity, and in an infinite number. [The understanding requires no tools other than itself to grasp the concept of eternity.]

The ideas which we form as clear and distinct, seem so to follow from the sole necessity of our nature; that they appear to depend absolutely on our sole power; with confused ideas the contrary is the case. They are often formed against our will.

The mind can determine in many ways the ideas of things, which the understanding forms from other ideas: thus, for instance, in order to define the plane of an ellipse, it supposes a point adhering to a cord to be moved around two centers.

The more ideas express perfection of any object, the more perfect they are in themselves; for we do not admire the architect who has designed a chapel so much as the architect who has planned a splendid temple.

Summation and Adieu

And so my friends we have reached the end of our discussion and illustration of Spinoza's 'Fragment' and the time which we have had to spend together.

If this discussion obtains to its intended purpose it will serve solely for the reader to grasp the significance of Baruch's discovery and the structure and functions of the human mind and serve as an entry way to penetrate the seeming density and overwhelming content of, "The Ethics Demonstrated in Geometric Order".

No one of us should come away from our work here together in any way thinking that we have grasped the entire essence of Baruch's thinking. This interpretation would miss the point entirely.

But what we hope to have accomplished is to establish a solid basis for beginning to appreciate the existence and the power of our individual minds. Further we have examined closely the precise methodology which we need to employ to clarify our thought processes. Carefully adhering to Baruch's method will afford us the ability to separate out those things which we can and do 'know' from things which we imagine that we know. This will certainly be no small achievement. This exercise in itself will help us to achieve serenity in our minds. There is a great deal of

freedom which comes from understanding our limits and the actual range of our well understood ideas.

Peace of mind will come to us when we see which of our thoughts constitute a waste of time and which need to be discarded from our thinking processes and limited amount of energy. This work will take patience and time to develop, but the rewards will prove well worth the effort.

And yet the fact of the matter is that once this stage of clarity is mastered the bulk of the work remains if one wishes to clearly understand Spinoza's masterful achievement in its entirety.

The next step will be to develop the perspective required to begin to approach "The Ethics" Part 1- Concerning God. But for now we will leave that for another day and an opportunity to come together again. That will occur in Pamphlet 2 which will follow this present one.

A concentrated and fully focused study of the "Ethics" will prove, for many of us, to be a lifelong journey and a most challenging one indeed. Please take all the time necessary to prepare for this arduous task.

In closing, please bear in mind that each of us must assume the responsibility to master Baruch's philosophy as far as possible, and to then develop ways to bring that learning into whatever sphere of influence in which we participate in order to facilitate a shift in the way we see ourselves. We must further assist those closest to our sensibilities to achieve the self-

same understanding, as Spinoza has requested of us.

No matter what field of endeavor you labor in: science, teaching, engineering, medicine, administration and management or any other discipline, in order to correct the current state of confused ideas that circulate widely as true will require a herculean effort on all our parts.

It must now become our responsibility to engage in the task of moving humanity forward to a new understanding of our merit and worth. We mark the most sophisticated evolutionary development that has ever occurred on this planet. We are the caretakers of ours and our planet's future.

Once we discover our own mind and it's near unlimited power to think clearly and to manipulate the environment, we will need to help our fellows to achieve the same goal.

There are some who feel that humankind's evolution is complete, nothing could be further from the truth; we have only just begun.

With this in mind I wish you all the best in your individual work and offer to you my most sincere affection.

I remain yours faithfully,

Charles M. Saunders
Summer 2014

APPENDIX

Suggested order of reading Spinoza's earlier works before approaching the "Ethics"

Some readers have found the 'Ethics' and in particular, part 1 'Concerning God' to appear impenetrable to comprehend. The language is indeed dense and technically challenging. This is Spinoza's philosophy and 'Part 1' is intended to be an airtight argument for his interpretation of precisely what the concept of god contains. Many have simply ignored it and passed on to the remaining four parts which are considerably easier to penetrate and to comprehend. The contention here is that would constitute a grave error and a disservice both to the reader and to Spinoza himself. Part 1 is the crux of the matter of human existence and our point and purpose for being alive.

It is not the place to begin a study of Baruch's thinking. That is why we have begun our study with the discussion and illustration of the 'Fragment', a very approachable document.

Here are a number of suggestions on how to approach Spinoza's work so that the reader will be in a position to clearly absorb and retain the maximum benefit from the process.

In order to become comfortable with Baruch's writing style and thought process, it might be best to start with the 'Political Treatise'.

In it Spinoza lays out a formula for deriving the maximum benefit for human society. He insists on beginning this society by recognizing the nature of both individuals and communities and the special needs that arise once their natures and affiliations are properly considered. He insists that basic human nature flourishes best in an environment of openness and freedom of thought. All of this would be organized around 'the rule of law' which no individual or body may abrogate or rise above. This is essentially a quite simple overview of the work. Each reader will make her or his own determination on the content and value of the piece.

The next work to consider would be the 'Theological-Political Treatise' in which Baruch, as a most noted biblical scholar and expert on the history and origins of the Judeo-Christian tradition, lays out a number of arguments and responds to questions related to the authenticity and legitimacy of both sects. His conclusions about the Jewish claim to a special covenant with the almighty and of the status of the Christian claim of 'Jesus' special connection to the deity are both fascinating and quite compelling.

Finally would come to complete the sequence, the 'Short Treatise on God, Man and His Well-Being'. This is essentially an early, abbreviated and immature version of the 'Ethics'. Again it is an approachable document and will serve to establish the reader's baseline for the study of his fully mature thinking and arguments in the 'Ethics'.

Spinoza is considered to be among the group of thinkers and philosophers known as the

'rationalists' and lived and worked in what is termed 'the age of reason'. Our contention remains that Spinoza stands alone no matter what designation is placed on him. He was the first and foremost metaphysician in human history and should be viewed as absolutely unique and a one of a kind thinker and ground breaker in the history of philosophy.

BRIEF CLOSING COMMENTARY

Most if not all of the individual sections, notes, commentary and even some paragraphs will seem to some readers to be not fully fleshed out or satisfactorily completed. Some of the comments on science, culture and religions of the world are simply brief snippets of what some might think would require much more substantiation and what we term ‘supporting evidence’ or ‘proof’ as to their veracity. But this piece was not the time or the place for elaboration. The mission was and was oft stated to be, to focus entirely on Spinoza’s words and the salient concepts from the ‘Fragment’. Any items including names of aforementioned thinkers in the history of philosophy, whose work was noted, or even of any footnoting, might have proved distracting to the reader and was purposely omitted.

Besides, this project should not rest solely on one set of shoulders. This will require the input and particular expertise of many minds to become fully fleshed out. We shall all look forward to the day when you individually step forward to aid and to guide all of us on this most necessary and much needed interpolation of the work on Baruch Spinoza’s thinking and on his massive contribution to moving this singularly human endeavor forward. In whatsoever field your expertise resides please feel most free to join us and to spread the word, so to speak.

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